

Emory Expands Existing Tech To Build COVID Symptom Checker

Emory University



Feeling feverish? Wondering if it's coronavirus? In 2020-21, Emory University quickly pivoted to adapt existing software into a free online symptom checker to help anyone assess the likelihood they've contracted COVID-19. Based on the answers to questions about signs and symptoms, age and more, a person would be directed to guidance based on CDC guidelines and is placed into one of three risk categories: high (needs immediate medical attention), intermediate (can contact their doctor for guidance), or low (can likely administer self-care or recover at home). Participants are never dissuaded from seeking professional medical advice or contacting their healthcare provider for more guidance.



VIDEO

“We’re all fighting, in ways big and small, to keep our loved ones out of harm’s reach. But the anxiety and uncertainty around the best way to do that can result in crowded emergency departments that will have difficulty managing the surge,” said Dr. Justin Schragger, emergency medicine physician at Emory University Hospital and co-founder of Vital.

“Our goal was to prevent that from happening, while also making it super simple for people to understand and follow CDC guidelines.”

Emory Department of Emergency Medicine’s Health DesignED Center physicians, including Chair Dr. David Wright and [Dr. Anna Quay Yaffee](#), assistant professor and director of Global Health in Emergency Medicine Section at Emory University School of Medicine; and Emory Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response’s [Dr. Alex Isakov](#), executive director and co-author of the SORT algorithm guided Vital, a software company focused on emergency department workflow, in designing the site and further developing SORT, an existing Emory technology originally designed for the H1N1 outbreak in 2009. The site is for educational purposes and not a replacement for a healthcare provider evaluation.

The ongoing relationship required substantial input from Emory’s Tech Transfer office to help address concerns of deploying university technology through Vital during the pandemic, including the use of the Emory trademarks and collection of individual’s data.

Emory’s OTT negotiated and executed a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement between Emory, USUHS, and Vital to develop and validate the technology and launch the Emory-Vital cobranded website. Vital did not charge the public for use of the symptom checker. Users could opt to share a zip code to contribute to research tracking the geographic spread and eventual recovery from the pandemic.

“Through this partnership, Emory and its academic colleagues also gain access to valuable epidemiological data that come from the public use of the website,” said John Nicosia, a Licensing Associate for Emory’s OTT.

[Vital](#) was founded by Schragger and [Aaron Patzer](#), founder of Mint.com, and launched in 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic, to help offset the already overloaded work of Emergency Departments.

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