

What's up with this pandemic and privacy?

Blair Stewart, 3 April 2020

Have you been wondering about the ethical dilemmas over use of personal information thrown up by a COVID-19? The compliance issues? The challenges yet to be faced in New Zealand? You're not alone and as part of its "independent, informed and fair public comment on privacy" mission the Privacy Foundation has added a [section to its website](#) linking to resources that might interest you.

As this area is so fast moving, we've concentrated on finding links to reliable sources of information that are kept up to date.

The resource page has a few local resources but perhaps of more interest are the several sources we've found that are, on a global basis, consolidating links to privacy guidance, referencing privacy research, or monitoring privacy invasive developments.

Interestingly, we've found three useful global sources that have taken a different approach from an academic, regulatory and advocacy perspective.

The academics

The Brussels-based VUB Law, Science, Technology & Society Research group recognised that the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent initiatives and policy measures trigger many crucial privacy and data protection law issues. Accordingly, they've assembled a great [resource page](#) including many materials by academic researchers. The resources are from all over the world but are particularly rich in relation to European materials.

Tracking has clearly been identified as a key issue as the materials are set out separately from general materials. Other resources are set out by reference to Europe-wide, countries within Europe and other countries internationally.

The regulators

The international conference of data protection and privacy commissioners has renamed itself as a Global Privacy Assembly. A [page](#) on their website sets out by country any guidance materials published by the relevant privacy regulators. Naturally enough most appear to be compliance advice to organisations.

The privacy advocates

Privacy International notes that Tech companies, governments, and international agencies have all announced measures to help contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Some of these measures impose severe restrictions on people's freedoms, including to their privacy. Unprecedented levels of surveillance and data exploitation are being tested across the world. Many of those measures are based on extraordinary powers, only to be used temporarily in emergencies. Others use exemptions in data protection laws to share data.

Privacy International seeks to keep track of them. When the pandemic is over, such extraordinary measures must be put to an end and held to account. Its [resource page](#) is updated as measures are reported.