

Real-Time Health Alerts Join Twitter to Expand Access to Public Health Information

By Linda Barlow | June 27, 2013

Is Twitter now monitoring your allergies or sleeping patterns?

In today's era of real-time information, Twitter has emerged as a leading go-to source for the latest in news, entertainment and more. Now, [Twitter](#) is joining [Everyday Health, Inc.](#) to create [HealthBeat](#), the first global real-time health alert and news offering. The partnership seeks to provide relevant health information and breaking news to the Twitter community in real time, offering promoted Tweets linking to Everyday Health's news, expert advice, videos and tools that users can put into action.

HealthBeat will scour the 2 million daily health-related tweets in the U.S. to identify impending outbreaks and other health crises.

"We'll be looking at the key health terms flaring up every day, and when something is indexing in an abnormal way, we'll let Twitter know and we'll supply content about what to do," said Everyday Health President Michael Keriakos, in an interview published in [Ad Age](#).

For example, Keriakos noted that HealthBeat could have been used to provide vaccination information to residents affected by a whooping cough outbreak in South Central Los Angeles two years ago.

Not only will the partnership provide important information relating to public health, it will also serve as a targeting mechanism for advertisers who are being sought by HealthBeat to promote content around broad health topics like allergies, flu season and insomnia.

While HealthBeat touts itself as the "first global real-time health alert" service, there are other online services – like [Google's flu tracker](#) – that provide similar information on a regional or national level:

- Launched in 2010, Health & Safety Watch is a Canadian-based web portal and iPhone app that lets users customize the type of alerts they want to see. It also indicates when an advisory or warning is over, for example, when a local water quality issue has been resolved.
- In the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides alerts about health issues travelers may face when going abroad as well as alerts about disease outbreaks at home.
- Also in the U.S., a service called HealthMap, developed out of Boston Children's Hospital, offers an online portal called The Disease Daily, and a mobile app called Outbreaks Near Me.

“The sooner we get a signal of an infectious disease outbreak, the sooner we can devise an appropriate response, and hopefully, the negative impacts can be mitigated,” explained Anna Tomasulo, MA, MPH, HealthMap Program Coordinator, Boston Children's Hospital.

According to Tomasulo, HealthMap has other tools that help prevent health problems.

“Our Vaccine Finder takes a person's zip code and provides information on where they can access vaccines nearby,” she says, noting that the project started with flu vaccines but has since been expanded to other vaccines including human papillomavirus (HPV), measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), Varicella and more. “A questionnaire helps users determine what vaccine is most appropriate and provides a list of participating pharmacies within a given radius that provides the vaccine the user needs. Such vaccines help prevent costs associated with illness and potential hospital stays.”

So are HealthBeat, HealthMap and other real-time alert programs providing an important public health service? Are these alerts helpful or will they cause undue concern?

To read this post on RWHC Blog, [click here](#).