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Mobile phone technology used to track disease outbreaks

Trial of new software to make it easier to help patients during outbreaks

by Amber Maitland published on 18 October 2006

A pilot scheme designed to track the spread of serious diseases around the world using mobile phones has been rolled out in Africa.

Mobile phones that belong to health workers in Africa are being equipped with software that lets them easily send and receive information about outbreaks and also get information about patients and drugs. It sends data through GPRS networks or SMS data channels, and uses Java so that it's compatible with many different handsets and operators.

Trials at the moment are going on in Rwanda and Indonesia, where it's being used to track the spread of bird flu.

The project, which is jointly developed by GSMA and Voxiva, a technology firm, will help to track outbreaks of HIV/AIDS and flu because it lets doctors send information to a central location where outbreaks can be mapped and tracked.

GSMA's director of strategic initiatives, Ben Soppitt, told the BBC, "This will allow health officials to see real-time accurate data on the status of the healthcare system in their country so they can make informed decisions about where those resources are applied".

The company's CEO, Rob Conway, also noted, "The efforts of the international health community to control pandemics, by getting life-saving drugs to those in need, depend heavily on a comprehensive and accurate picture of what is happening on the ground".