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Pentagon team reveals Covid-19-detecting chip that can be implanted in the body

- DARPA, a US military research lab, has developed a chip that can continuously test people's blood for the new coronavirus
- The invention is in late-stage testing and could be administered to sailors, researchers say



Members of the US Navy salute the ensign for colours during a decommissioning ceremony of the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard at Naval Base San Diego on April 14, 2021. Photo: Handout via AP

A team of US scientists working under the US Department of Defense has unveiled a chip that it said can detect signs of the new coronavirus in human bodies within minutes when it is implanted under the skin.

Retired Colonel Matt Hepburn said that the implant invented by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), a Pentagon unit that develops emerging technologies for military use, can continuously test blood.



The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group transits in formation with the Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group in the South China Sea on April 9, 2021. Photo: Handout

Carried in a tissue-like gel, the microchip shows chemical reactions in the body – a signal to wearers that they will develop symptoms the next day. This allows them to get tested early for the virus, he said.



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“We can have that information in three to five minutes,” Hepburn told CBS News show 60 Minutes last Sunday.

“As you truncate that time, as you diagnose and treat, what you do is you stop the infection in its tracks.”

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Hepburn suggested that the chip could be used to monitor the health of sailors.

The chip implant does not trace movement and is now in late-stage testing, researchers said.

Medical microchips have been around since 2004 when the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved an implantable radio frequency identification (RFID) device that enabled doctors to access a wearer's medical records.

Since then, scientists have developed implantable microchip devices to deliver birth control drugs and other medicine, as well as chips that monitor health indicators such as heart rate and blood oxygen level.

But microchipping humans, even for medical reasons, has spurred privacy fears. Biotechnology firms have yet to deliver a product that is attractive to a large slice of the population.

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DARPA, founded in response to the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik 1 satellite in 1957, has been working on pandemic prevention for years.

Another recent DARPA invention is a filter that can be attached to a dialysis machine to remove the coronavirus from the blood of critically ill patients, researchers revealed.

The filter was tested on “Patient 16”, a military spouse in intensive care who was near death due to organ failure and septic shock.

After the experimental four-day treatment, the patient made a full recovery.

The FDA has since approved the filter for emergency use.

