

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

2020/21 VIROLOGY SURVEILLANCE SCHEME

What is the Virology Surveillance Scheme?

The virology surveillance scheme is a programme to measure the effectiveness of the influenza vaccination. The scheme is also used for surveillance of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, throughout the winter.

Why am I being swabbed?

You are being asked for 2 swabs: a nasal swab and a throat swab. This is because your GP suspects that you may be suffering or have recently suffered from flu, COVID-19 or a similar respiratory illness.

Why are you conducting surveillance?

The burden of influenza during winter season and now the COVID-19 pandemic on the National Health Service (NHS) is significant. By providing this swab, you are enabling public health bodies to make crucial public health decisions.

What happens now?

The samples which you have provided will be sent to the Public Health England (PHE) laboratory at Colindale to be tested for various respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, Influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus. Your NHS number will be assigned a unique identifier by PHE. The data from these tests will be linked **confidentially** to data regularly extracted from medical records, and stored at the secure servers of The Oxford Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) Research and Surveillance Centre (RSC) based at the Universities of Oxford and Surrey. The results from these tests may give us an insight about the effectiveness of the flu vaccines, which may in turn provide information on which vaccine is the most effective for the new season of flu. This would also provide further information about the spread of COVID-19 in different regions.

If you have requested a self-swabbing kit using the TakeATestUK.com website, this is through a Public Health England (PHE) contract, and no data will be retained within the TakeATestUK.com system. For further details please visit: <https://takeatestuk.com/phe-home/>.

What will be done with my swab result?

Your swab result will not only be communicated to you, but it will be used (anonymously) to monitor the progress of an influenza epidemic and COVID-19 pandemic, to give feedback to GPs regarding their diagnosis, to monitor antiviral resistance, to test how effective the influenza vaccine has been that particular season, and to provide the World Health Organization with appropriate viruses which help them to decide what will constitute the next year's influenza vaccination. So all in all your sample is very important!

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

To protect your privacy, the lab will not share your identity with the researchers. Your NHS number will be converted to a unique identifier. This surveillance will extract routinely collected data held in the surgery for all patients who have consented to take part by providing a nose and throat swab. This data will have the same unique identifier, and will be used to by researchers to link your sample to data such as your flu vaccination history.

What will happen to my data?

Data protection regulation requires that we state the legal basis for processing information about you. In the case of research, this is 'a task in the public interest.' The University of Oxford is the data controller and is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

We will be using information from NHS Digital in order to undertake this surveillance and will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible.

Public Health England and University of Surrey will act as data processors. The University of Oxford will collect data about you for this surveillance from your GP Practice.

Data protection regulation provides you with control over your personal data and how it is used. When you agree to your information being used in research, however, some of those rights may be limited in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available at: <https://compliance.web.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

Further Enquiries:

If you have any further enquiries regarding the Oxford RCGP Research and Surveillance Centre (RSC) - PHE virology surveillance scheme, please do not hesitate to contact your GP. Alternatively, if you require further details you can contact us by emailing practiceenquiries@phc.ox.ac.uk.