

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET (Virology)

2025/2026 GIVING SWAB SAMPLES FOR DISEASE SURVEILLANCE

What is disease surveillance?

Disease surveillance involves taking virology swabs from volunteer patients to help us to monitor respiratory viruses circulating in the community and to support vaccine effectiveness.

NOSE and THROAT SWABS or VIROLOGY SURVEILLANCE

What is virology surveillance?

Virology surveillance is a programme to measure the effectiveness of the influenza/flu, RSV, and COVID-19 vaccinations using results from swabs taken by patients who are unwell. The swabs are used to monitor the spread of several respiratory viruses, like influenza (flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), in different regions throughout the winter.

Why am I, or my child, being swabbed?

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

Why are we conducting virology surveillance?

The anticipated burden of flu, RSV and COVID-19 during winter season 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?

Your healthcare professional will ask you to give verbal consent. Written consent is not required as stipulated in [The Health Service \(Control of Patient Information\) Regulations 2002 - Regulation 3](#). If you agree, they will take a nose and throat swab. For patients under the age of 18, verbal consent will be given on their behalf by a parent or guardian. The samples, which you, or your child, have provided, will be sent to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) laboratory at Colindale or North Bristol to be tested for various respiratory viruses, including flu, SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Your, or your child's, NHS number will be assigned a unique identifier by UKHSA. The data from these tests will be linked **confidentially** to data regularly extracted from medical records, and stored at the secure server of the Oxford Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) Research and Surveillance Centre (RSC) based at the University of Oxford. If you have requested a self-swabbing kit using the TakeATestUK.com website, this is through a UKHSA 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, or my child's, swab result?

Your, or your child's, swab result will be communicated to you, and it will be used (anonymously) to monitor the progress of flu, RSV and SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), to

give feedback to GPs regarding their diagnosis, to monitor antiviral resistance, to test how effective the flu, RSV and COVID-19 vaccines have been this season, and to provide the World Health Organization (WHO) information help them to decide on next year's flu vaccine. Your, or your child's, sample is very important.

Will my, or my child's, taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Virology swabs will be labelled with your, or your child's, details. However, to protect your privacy, the lab will not share your, or your child's, identity with the researchers. Your, or your child's, 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, or my child's, data?

Data protection regulation requires that we state the legal basis for processing information about you, or your child. In the case of research, this is 'a task in the public interest.'

UKHSA is the data controller. The Royal College of General Practitioners and the University of Oxford are data processors, and will collect data about you, or your child, for this surveillance from your GP Practice. UKHSA as the data controller is responsible for ensuring your, or your child's, data is managed securely.

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

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>

Do I have to take part?

No. Your decision to take part is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to give a swab, or choose for your child not to give a swab, it will not be collected. If you agreed to take part in **the Enhanced Surveillance scheme**, you may be contacted by one of the UKHSA clinical team.

Further Enquiries:

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