

Information Sheet for School Head Teacher

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COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey 2 (SIS2) overview

The study is being conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, working with the Department for Education and is funded by the UK Health Security Agency.

We are inviting a sample of schools in England to take part in testing for coronavirus (COVID-19) antibodies. We need to find out how many school pupils have developed antibodies against the virus and how this changes over the course of the year. The information we collect will help inform policies to protect school pupils and staff.

Visits to the schools and testing will be organised and undertaken by study workers from ONS. Only the persons involved in running the survey will use information about participants for this study – they will not pass it on to anyone not involved in the study.

2

Why are we doing this study?

We are now looking beyond COVID-19 transmission in schools and want to inform policies to aid school recovery.

This study is voluntary. Schools and pupils do not have to take part and can withdraw at any round of testing. If some tests have already been completed when they change their minds, we will still use the data from them unless they tell us not to. This is because it is very important for our study to get a good picture of who has had COVID-19 antibodies.

The analysis from this study will help us work out the best way to manage the COVID-19 pandemic in school settings. We will produce a report following each round of testing and publish it on the ONS website. Any data presented by ONS will not identify any individuals or schools. The results of this study may also be presented at academic meetings and may be published in medical journals in a de-identified manner.

3 What does the study involve?

Please enrol your school on to the study by completing the excel registration template and sending this back to us at Schools.Studies.Mailbox@ons.gov.uk.

Once the school has enrolled, we will supply you with invitation letters and information sheets for parents and students. We require the school to send these documents via email, to notify those eligible to take part in the study. These documents contain instructions to complete an online consent and registration questionnaire.

Once this is submitted, the participants will be enrolled into the study.

A testing team coordinated by ONS will visit your school to collect the following sample per term:

- Oral fluid (saliva) sample – this involves putting a small sponge into the mouth for two minutes to test for antibodies against the virus.

Study staff will check with the children that they are willing to take part before testing starts on the day. If a child shows signs of distress at the time of testing, then they will be offered the option of withdrawing from the test at that time. Please note that if your school includes pre-school/nursery years children, they will not be included in the study. Please do not send any materials to parents of pre-school/nursery years children.

Study staff will wear appropriate protective clothing when taking the samples or helping children to take the samples themselves. The children will be supervised by school staff at all times.

Alongside testing we will ask parents and secondary school aged students to complete a follow up questionnaire. In these questionnaires we will ask about them, their child and their health, and additional information about other household members.

You will also be invited to complete a headteacher questionnaire online, covering topics such as COVID-19 control measures and mental health service provision.

4 What will happen next?

We plan to arrange three appointments before Easter with the schools enrolled to collect oral fluid samples.

The testing of the samples will be carried out by UKHSA or affiliated laboratories which will receive anonymous data regarding participants.

5 How will testing be undertaken in schools?

Testing will be conducted on the school site and is expected to be completed in the majority of schools over the course of one school day. For larger schools, testing may take up to two days. Our ONS School Co-ordinators will be able to advise on this after enrolment. A visiting team consisting of three study workers will attend the school to conduct testing.

The study team will liaise with the school before testing takes place to make arrangements for the location of the testing on site. This will depend on the facilities within each school. The oral fluid (saliva) sample can be taken from pupils while they are seated at their desks in the classroom.

Within all schools, all pupils will be invited to participate. The study workers will be DBS checked and will have received specific training to ensuring the pupils are in the right place at the right time and that samples are appropriately collected and labelled. Pupils will watch a video about the process. All of our staff will be following current PPE guidelines.

6 What will you do with the information?

We will need to collect some personal information from participants, including:

- Names
- Dates of birth
- Contact details
- Health information

We need this information to understand the results of the tests that we perform and to contact participants to give them the results.

We will keep all the information securely in accordance with the [General Data Protection Regulations \(GDPR\)](#) and the [Data Protection Act 2018](#), the basis for processing your information is public task, specifically for statistical purposes. The reports produced will not identify participants. The ONS has the statutory objective to promote and safeguard the production of official statistics that serve the public good. In order for us to produce statistics we may link the data we obtain through this study with other survey and administrative data that we hold. We intend to link the information we collect from the Schools Infection Survey to other data sources that can inform us about the impact of the pandemic on schools and young people. For example, we may link data to test and trace records, hospital episode statistics, school absence data and relevant information from the 2021 Census. Data linkage is a method of bringing information from different sources together, about the same individual. For this study data linkage will help us better understand the effects of COVID-19. [Further information on what we use data for is available.](#)

Ethical approval for this study has been granted by UKHSA Research and Public Health Practice Ethics and Governance Group, LSHTM Research Ethics Committee and the National Statisticians Data Ethics Advisory Committee. All our uses of data will comply with **[UK Statistics Authority's ethical framework](#)**. This means that only people who will need to know who participants are to deliver the study will be able to access personal information. Further information on the ethical framework is available. The ONS will continue to hold the data collected through this study for as long as it remains useful for statistical research and production. During the study, the ONS will follow a de-identification process, which is used to prevent someone's personal identity from being revealed or identified. As such the ONS may provide access to accredited researchers, via accredited processing environments, where it is lawful and ethical to do so. When making this de-identified data available we may link the data we obtain through this study with other survey and administrative data that we hold. Access will only be provided to support valuable new research insights about UK society and the economy that are considered to be in the public good. We need to manage information in specific ways for the research to be reliable. This may mean that we won't be able to let participants see or change the data we hold about them. We will keep all information about participants safe and secure.

ONS and UKHSA are joint data controllers for this study. This means that ONS are collecting and using the data, and some personal data including those listed above will be shared with UKHSA to deliver the study and conduct the antibody testing on anonymised samples. UKHSA data retention period is 8 years, but please contact us if you have any questions or concerns about this. LSHTM and DfE, whilst part of the study, will not see any personal data. But they will access the de-identified data through secure environments as explained above.

Our lawful basis is relied upon under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) Article 6(1)(e). Where the processing also includes special category data our lawful basis is found in Article 9(2)(j).

During enrolment we will ask participants/parents and guardians whether any remaining oral fluid samples can be stored by UKHSA, so that they may be used in the future for research on infections caused by viruses. The samples will be stored anonymously and it will not be possible to link the sample back to your students. Students can still take part even if they ask us to have the samples destroyed after the tests are complete.

7 Does the school, and the pupils/staff in the school, have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. If you choose not to take part, this will in no way affect the care and education that everyone receives. Individual participants can also decide to withdraw from any round of testing, without giving a reason by emailing Schools.Studies.Mailbox@ons.gov.uk or by calling the ONS helpline on 0808 196 1270. We would like to keep the information, and results that we might already have collected, unless individuals concerned tell us not to.

8 What if I have any concerns?

If you have any concerns about the use of personal data or want to find out more about your rights under data protection legislation, please see the following data protection webpages or contact the Data Protection Officer via email.

- [ONS's data protection page](#) or contact DPO@Statistics.gov.uk
- [The UK Health Security Agency \(UKHSA\) data protection page](#) or contact data_protection@dhsc.gov.uk

Thank you for your time.