

## Covid-19 Mapping and Mitigation in Schools (CoMMInS) research study: Call for Bristol schools

### About the study

Ensuring pupils and staff stay safe in school this autumn is a major challenge because there is very little scientific evidence on the incidence and transmission of COVID-19 within schools. A ground-breaking research project will test whether 5,000 staff and pupils have active or past COVID-19 infection, develop systems to help schools prevent and cope with an outbreak and assess strategies to support the mental wellbeing of the school community now and moving forward.

University of Bristol researchers, who are leading the study, are in the process of recruiting Bristol schools to participate in the research. We hope that you will consider volunteering your school to be part of this unique opportunity.

[Please see further details at the end of this information sheet.](#)

A separate national study (called the TERM Project) led by Middlesex University in collaboration with the Joint Biosecurity Centre at the Department of Health would like to check for signs of SARS-Cov2 virus in the wastewater of schools to establish whether this could provide a useful 'early warning' system of infection levels. There would be a lot of benefit to conducting this additional study in the same schools as the Bristol-led CoMMInS study, where individuals are also being tested.

[If your school is interested in participating in this additional study, please let us know by adding this to your email response.](#)

### FAQs

Who will be tested for Covid-19 and how often?

We will test each pupil in years 2, 5, 8, 10 and 12 in each participating Primary or Secondary school once a month for six months. For every four pupils tested, we need to test roughly one member of staff as we are aiming to include 4,000 pupils and 1,000 staff in the study.

Which staff can take part in the study?

We welcome participation from all groups of staff, including teachers, TAs and technicians as well as catering, cleaning, administrative, premises and other staff.

What and how will we tell staff, pupils and parents about the study?

The team will supply age-appropriate information sheets and consent/assent forms for staff, pupils and parents.

How will staff and pupils be tested?

Each student and member of staff will provide a saliva sample (by drooling) into a separate container with a small funnel. Collecting each sample takes less than 5 minutes.

Who will carry out the testing?

Fully-trained and DBS-checked project staff will visit schools to collect spit samples from staff and pupils and will take the samples to the labs. Staff will be aware that some students might find the process embarrassing and will be sympathetic to this.

Where will the testing take place?

Testing can be carried out in pupils' usual classroom, or in the school medical room or hall. The study team will work with each school to make sure arrangements are best suited to participants and to their school facilities. The aim will be to minimise any additional infection risk.

**How quickly will test results be returned?**

Tests will be processed in University of Bristol labs. Positive results will be returned within 72 hours.

**What happens if a member of staff or pupil tests positive?**

We will tell any adult – or the parent/carer of any pupil – who tests positive and aim to do so within 72 hours. Public Health England (PHE) will ask them to self-isolate with their families. PHE or local health officials will trace their contacts and ask these to self-isolate too. Any participant testing positive will be invited to take part in a further Household Study which will test all members of that individual's household and close contacts weekly for the following 4 weeks.

**Will test results be confidential?**

We will not share test results with others in school and require the school to keep test results confidential too. In line with government policy, we will inform PHE and local health officials of positive Covid-19 test results.

**What are the health benefits to staff and pupils?**

Anyone who tests positive for Covid-19, even if asymptomatic, will no longer be in school. This will greatly reduce the risk of transmission to others.

**Will the project help to prevent an outbreak of Covid-19 in school?**

We cannot guarantee that participating in the project will prevent an outbreak of Covid-19. However, identifying any asymptomatic cases each month will reduce the risk of an outbreak. Your pupils will also have access to our Germ Defence app, which will be repurposed to give practical advice to help reduce the infection rate at school, at home and in the community.

**How will you assess the impact of returning to school on staff and pupil wellbeing?**

Staff and pupils at a small number of schools will be asked to participate in individual interviews to explore their wellbeing on returning to school. The interviews will be carried out confidentially by suitably qualified project staff.

**What would participation cost my school?**

There is no cost for participating, and any costs arising from the project will be met by the research team. The study will fund a 0.2 FTE supply teacher for the school year for each participating school.

**What is the time commitment?**

We expect in-school organisation and liaison with the project team to require up to 0.2 FTE staff time. We ask that each participating school has a named contact for liaison with the project team.

**What happens if some pupils do not wish to take part?**

We hope that most pupils in the target year groups will take part, but of course participation is not compulsory and no pupil or staff member should be persuaded to take part if they do not wish to.

**How will the project team support participating schools?**

The team will supply information sheets for staff, pupils and parents. These can be supplied electronically or as hard copies. The project manager will communicate with schools regularly via email and will be available to answer questions by email or phone.

**How will the Household Study collect samples if the individual is not in school?**

Where a household has agreed to take part in this part of the study, a member of the project team will visit the household and leave saliva sampling kits for collection on the doorstep. The members of the household will provide samples at their convenience and call to arrange collection.

**What other information will you need to collect apart from a saliva sample?**

We will ask pupils and staff who take part in the study to complete a short questionnaire. We will also link individuals' test results to their NHS health records.

**What are the educational benefits of joining the study?**

Project staff will lead a group of pupil '*research champions*' or '*research leaders*' in each school; these pupils will learn about the research process and have opportunities to influence the study. The research team is happy to lead assemblies or lessons about the study, either in person or virtually. We will also create science/maths lesson materials for teachers to deliver about the research and its methods.

**What will participating schools be told about the research findings?**

We will provide research progress bulletins to the school named contact every month. These can be shared with the school community if desired. When results are published, we will provide age-appropriate summaries for research participants.

**Who will be told about the findings of the whole study?**

The study will provide important information for Bristol's Health Protection Team. We expect the research findings to be

published in academic journals with international readerships. We will also share study findings with the NHS, education specialists, the government, and the media.

Will schools' participation be credited in the research publications? Or will they be anonymous?

We would like to recognise the role all schools play in the study and would very much like to credit them in published outputs from the study.

Who are the researchers?

The project is led by Professor Caroline Relton from the University of Bristol. The researchers include epidemiologists, virologists, data scientists, engineers and health psychologists. The project partners include Bristol City Council, Public Health England and two Bristol schools. The TERM project is a collaboration led by researchers at Middlesex University.

Who is funding the research?

The NIHR-UKRI Covid-19 rapid response initiative (UK government research funding) is providing funding of £2.7 million for the 12-month CoMMinS study.

Can every school that expresses interest join the study?

We plan to recruit 20 Bristol schools and will seek to ensure that those recruited to the study are representative of the city demographics.

What does the wastewater study involve?

An autosampler will be installed to collect samples from the drainage system of the school. The autosampler will be left on location until the end of the school year. Trained staff will collect samples twice per week and transfer directly to a wastewater laboratory for analysis.

What will the school need to do?

There should be no need for sample collection to directly involve personnel from the school. We will need permission from each school to allow samplers to install the autosampler on the school drainage system. Prior to sample collection commencing, the sampling company will undertake a full "Reliability, Availability, Maintainability, and Safety Study" which the school signs to indicate its approval for sampling to go ahead.

What will be measured in the wastewater?

We plan to measure viral load concentration for SARS-CoV-2 and influenza. Each sample collected will be a pooled sample of all the pupils and staff in the school.

What will the wastewater data be used for?

We plan to use the data collected to monitor trends in SARS-CoV-2 viral load in wastewater with the aim to develop an 'early warning' system and rapid response.

If I express an interest in the study, what happens next?

To express interest in your school joining the study, **please email [commins-study@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:commins-study@bristol.ac.uk)** . We will then contact you by email or phone to discuss your involvement.

**School name:**

**Primary or secondary:**

**Contact name:**

**Contact email:**

**Contact tel.:**

**Number of pupils in school:**

**Number of staff in school:**

**My school is also interested in participating in the TERM wastewater sampling study: YES / NO**