

Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form

PNOE (Participatory Network for cOmmunity Epidemiological Surveillance)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

IMPORTANT: Please read this information carefully before deciding whether to take part. If there is anything you do not understand or you have any questions, please contact the study team before you agree to participate, although you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time with no questions asked.

What is the purpose of this study?

We are setting up a system to monitor the spread of influenza, COVID-19 and other respiratory illness in Cyprus. We want to understand how these illnesses spread through the community — not just among people who see a doctor, but in the general population.

To do this, we need volunteers like you to fill in a short online survey every week, telling us whether you have had any cold or flu symptoms. Even if you have been completely well, your 'no symptoms' response is just as important to us. And it takes a minute of your time every week.

We are inviting all adults (aged 18 or over) who live in Cyprus and have access to a mobile device (smartphone or tablet). Everybody can help, and you are most welcome to share the study with your friends and family.

Do I have to take part?

No - taking part is completely voluntary. If you decide not to take part, this will not affect your access to any healthcare or other services. If you do decide to take part, you can still withdraw at any time, by clicking a button in the SCEPI mobile application.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will:

- Read this information sheet and complete a consent form inside the SCEPI app. This will take about 2 minutes.
- Complete a three-part questionnaire, delivered via the SCEPI app, asking about your age, household, job, health and vaccination status. This will take about 5–10 minutes and only needs to be done once, although we ask you to update it every year.
- Complete a weekly questionnaire in the SCEPI app, asking you about respiratory illness symptoms during the past week. If you have had no symptoms, it will take less than one minute. If you have had symptoms it will take slightly longer, and you will be encouraged to also fill in a short symptom diary every day.

There are no visits to a healthcare facility, medical examinations or medications of any kind involved -- just the filling in of questionnaires.

What are the possible risks?

The study has very low risk to you. There are no physical procedures involved. The only potential risk is to your privacy and personal data, but we take extensive steps to protect those (please see below "What will happen to my data?"). The weekly symptoms checklist may occasionally prompt you to notice health symptoms, but it does not offer you any medical diagnosis or advice. In fact, nothing in the PNOE study should be interpreted as medical advice. If you are worried about your health, please always contact your GP. For questions about the study, you can always send us an anonymous message directly via the SCEPI app.

What are the possible benefits?

By taking part in the study, you are helping us monitor flu, COVID-19 and other respiratory virus activity in your community in near real time. This useful information is made public at an online dashboard on the PNOE website, and is additionally disseminated to scientists and Public Health authorities. You will also receive an annual summary report of all our findings.

What will happen to my data?

We take your privacy very seriously. Here is how we handle your information:

- Your email address is only used to authenticate you in the SCEPI app as a unique user, and is not visible even to us researchers.
- All your survey answers are stored using a random participant number (pseudonymization), which cannot be linked back to you by anyone analyzing the data or looking at the results.
- We NEVER share any of your personal information with any third party (including your employer, insurer, GP or any government agency) and we never sell your data or use it for any commercial purpose.
- Research results are always reported in aggregate form only – you will never be identified individually.
- Your data are stored securely in our encrypted server for scientific purposes. Via the SCEPI app you have **full transparency into the exact data you have shared with us**. We only collect the minimum data required for the purposes of our research.
- You can withdraw your participation at any time by clicking a button on the SCEPI app, opting to delete all the data you have shared with us. Deletion is immediate and we do not ask you any questions.

The legal basis for processing your data is public interest research under the EU General Data Protection regulation. You have the right to access all your data, correct inaccuracies or request deletion of your data and account at any time. These rights are exercised directly via the SCEPI mobile app, fully under your control at all times, without any intervention on our part. If you have questions about those rights, contact the Data Protection Officer of the European University Cyprus at dpo@euc.ac.cy.

What will happen to the results?

We will be publishing all study results on the PNOE website, including respiratory viruses activity curves and incidence maps, updated at least weekly. We will be sharing research findings in scientific journals and conferences, and in an annual Public Health summary report to participants. All publications will use only anonymous aggregated data.

Who has organised, funded and approved the study?

The PNOE study is organised by the School of Medicine, European University Cyprus under the lead of Dr. Theodore Lytras, Associate Professor of Public Health (t.lytras@euc.ac.cy). It has received no specific external funding. PNOE has been reviewed and received ethical approval by the Cyprus National Bioethics Committee [reference number to be inserted], who will be asked to review it again after 5 years or earlier in case of major protocol changes.

What if I have a concern or complaint?

If you have any question or concern about any aspect of the study, you can contact the lead investigator Dr. Theodore Lytras via email at t.lytras@euc.ac.cy. Enrolled participants can additionally message the research team directly and anonymously via the SCEPI mobile app.

How do I sign up?

If you would now like to take part, please download the SCEPI app and scan the study QR code (or enter the study URL [study URL to be added]) to sign the consent form and enrol into PNOE. Thank you for considering taking part — every participant helps us protect community health.

Please read each statement below and check the box to confirm your agreement before proceeding with registration.

- ☐ I have read and understood the above Participant Information Sheet.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time at the click of a button, without giving any reason and without my medical care or legal rights being affected.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study my account information will be deleted, and I can opt to also delete the pseudonymised survey data that I have already submitted.
- ☐ I understand that my survey responses will be stored using a random code number, kept separately from my email address, and will never be published in a form that could identify me.
- ☐ I understand that my data are held securely by the European University Cyprus, and used only for the research described in the Participant Information Sheet.
- ☐ I agree to my pseudonymised data being analysed for Public Health surveillance and scientific research purposes, as described in the Participant Information sheet.
- ☐ I understand that research findings will be published online, using only anonymous aggregated data.
- ☐ I confirm that I am aged 18 years or over, and currently resident in Cyprus.
- ☐ I agree to take part in the above study.