

Dear Colleague

Re: COVID-19 Stress and Health Study (STAFF ONLY) – participation open until 30th April 2020

Staff at your practice / CCG are invited to participate in a research study examining how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the mental and physical health of people in the UK, including people working in the NHS.

The study involves completing a short online survey (approx. 10 minutes) and taking a couple of minutes to collect a small sample of hair from the back of your head. The study team will use this to measure the stress hormone cortisol. You are asked to do this now (or as soon as possible) and again 12 weeks later. This research will assess how stressed you feel but also how this stress is affecting you physically too.

Full details about the study and a link to participate are on this website: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/new-stress-hormone-study>. A participant information sheet is attached. **Please note: Some NHS computers will not allow access to the link for the study, and you may be presented with a security warning. If this occurs, please try a different browser such as Google Chrome or Firefox, or try accessing the link from a non NHS device.**

The first wave of the study ends soon (**last day to participate is 30th April**). **Please feel free to participate and please share this information with all staff at your practice/CCG.**

PLEASE DO NOT SEND THIS INFORMATION TO YOUR PATIENTS.

Participant information

(v2.0 – dated 20.4.2020)

Please read this carefully before consenting to take part.

Your invitation

You are being invited to take part in our research project. Before you decide we would like you to understand why this research is being done and what it would involve.

What is this project about and what will it involve?

We want to understand how the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting the physical and emotional health of people in the UK. This will involve:

- (1) Completing a short online survey (about 10 minutes long) and
- (2) Collecting and storing a small sample of your hair. **Each sample of hair you provide will need to be at least 3mm wide and 1 cm long.** Each sample is taken from the back of your head. This is done discreetly so that it is not visible where you have taken your sample from.

You will be asked to provide two hair samples (at the start of the study and 12 weeks later) and complete a survey each time you provide a sample. We will also get in touch with you and ask you to complete a survey when the UK government changes its social distancing measures.

We will ask you to store your hair samples in a dark, dry place initially (e.g., a cupboard or drawer). We will then email you after 12 weeks to send us your hair samples in the post (Freepost – Postage Paid by Research Team). We will not ask you to do this until both hair samples have been taken and current social restrictions have been lifted. This is because we do not wish to overburden the postal service at this time or ask you to take any unnecessary trips.

The surveys will help us examine how the pandemic is affecting your emotional health. The hair sample will allow us to measure the hormone cortisol. This hormone changes when we are stressed and it can affect how other parts of our body, such as our immune system, work. The process for collecting and storing your hair sample is simple and painless and we will give you full instructions on how to do this.

Providing these hair samples will allow us to explore whether any stress you experience today and in the coming weeks could affect your health in the future. We will be seeking funding to measure cortisol in these samples at the end of the study. As cortisol remains stable in hair samples for many years, and so we will store your samples until funding is secured. In the unlikely event funding cannot be obtained we will ask you if you wish to have your samples returned to you or destroyed.

Who can take part?

Anyone can take part as long as you are:

- Aged 18 years or older
- Able to read English well enough to complete the survey
- Able to provide a sample of hair which is 1cm long
- Currently residing in the UK
- Able to confirm you have understood what the study is about and agree to being involved

Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any point. However, the information you have already provided will continue to be used in the analysis.

What will happen to the information I give you?

Once you consent to the study a unique ID will be generated which will be used to keep all your information anonymous but still allow us to link your survey responses to your hair samples.

The information you provide will be stored anonymously by the University of Nottingham for 7 years after the end of the research. At this point the data will be reviewed, and if they are still deemed to be of public interest, they may be retained for longer. The analysis of your data will be conducted by the study team led by the University of Nottingham.

If information is disclosed during the study that could pose a risk of harm to the participant or others, the researcher will discuss this with the CI and where appropriate report accordingly.

Your data will be stored in password-protected files and may be used in academic publications.

Your IP address will not be stored.

Responsible members of the University of Nottingham and funders may also be given access to data for monitoring and/or audit of the study to ensure we are complying with guidelines, or as otherwise required by law.

We will also ask you for an email address so that we can contact you for the follow-up surveys. However, this email address will be removed from the rest of the answers you give before any analysis takes place and will be deleted as soon as the study finishes. Your email address will not be passed to any third parties.

The findings will be used to help us understand the impact of the pandemic on the emotional and physical health of the UK population and what we need to do to support people.

What will happen to any samples I give?

Your hair sample will be taken and stored by yourself. We will provide you with instructions on how to do this. You will receive instructions on how to send the samples to us in the post (Freepost) at a later date.

Once we receive your samples they will be stored securely by the study team until they are analysed. Your samples will be anonymous (labelled only with your unique ID) and you will not be identified in any way.

Concerns

If you have any concerns about the study, you can contact the study team at covid19andstress@nottingham.ac.uk. If you feel your concerns have not been handled satisfactorily, you can contact the Ethics Committee Secretary on FMHS-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk