

I'm a Scientist, Decipher My Data: Flu!

Information Sheet for Parents



DATE OF LETTER BEING SENT

We would like to inform you of a research project that your child's school is taking part in.

I'm a Scientist, Decipher my Data: Flu! - Information Sheet

Introduction

Decipher My Data is a science engagement project and research study rolled into one. Scientists from University College London want to see if school absence data can provide a good warning system for spotting flu outbreaks. At the same time we want to give school students the chance to do some real science.

Title of Project: **I'm a Scientist, Decipher my Data: Flu!**

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (Project ID Number): 3294/001

Name: Dr Robert Aldridge

Work Address: UCL Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology
Department of Infection and Population Health
Royal Free Campus
Rowland Hill Street
London
NW3 2PF

Contact Details Email: r.aldridge@ucl.ac.uk
Tel: 0207 8302239

So what's the study about?

We want to see if school absence data can be a good early warning of flu outbreaks in the wider population. Many people with flu don't see a doctor if they are unwell as it is often a mild self-limiting illness. However, some flu detection systems rely on people visiting their GPs. These systems are therefore less sensitive than detection systems that use other methods. Small pilot studies have shown that schools could be a useful early warning system. We ran the project last year to see if the project would work, however, levels of flu were the lowest seen in 25 years and as a result we weren't able answer this research question. We are therefore running the project again with some changes based upon the feedback from schools about how to improve the project.

What's this document for?

The headteacher of your school has already signed a consent form to indicate that they are happy for the school to take part in the project. As good practice we also want to inform parents or carers of children at the school about this exciting piece of work so that you understand why the school is taking part and what this involves.

Who is running this project?

The study is being led by Dr Rob Aldridge of the [UCL Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology](#). He is responsible for the study, the data collected and the final publication of results. [Gallomanor Communications](#) is a company specialising in science engagement and is running the project with the UCL team.

What is in it for your child and the school?

Decipher My Data will give students at the school a chance to be involved in a research project by collecting, analysing and reporting on real data. Students will be contributing to real science and learning first hand about how research is actually carried out. From start to finish, pupils will learn about the process of obtaining permission to run an experiment, collecting and analysing data, reporting their findings and having them peer-reviewed. At the end of the study they will see the result of their work submitted for publication



in a respected academic journal.

What is involved?

We are looking for 40 or more schools across England and Wales to participate in the study. Schools are going to provide data on the number of absences on a weekly basis broken down by year group and gender for the whole school. The class taking part in the project will then be expected to input this data on the Decipher My Data website. Classes can then write up their findings on the Decipher My Data website for review by other schools and the UCL team. The public will also be able to review these reports.

What's going to happen with the data?

School absence data will be combined at the level of school year group and no school names would be published with the data. The data will be used as part of this national study and an academic paper that will be published in a scientific journal. Your child's school will be credited as a co-author and the headteacher will have chance to read the paper before it gets submitted for publication. All data collected will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

What reports will be publicly available?

Lab logs are used by individual students to record their analyses of the data. The logs include individual students analysis of the data and include graphs and pictures of their work, which the scientist working on the project can reply to with comments, encouragement and further suggestions for analysis. The logs publically identify the user name of the person leaving the log, but we ask pupils not to use real names and specify that they don't identify a school at any time. All lab logs and replies to them are pre-moderated by our team before being published and therefore reviewed for appropriateness and to ensure no school or pupil names are included.

Project reports are written jointly by a whole class/school club taking part at some point during the project and are commented on by the scientists. We ask the teacher to not identify their school by name or by identifying features (e.g. a school of 1732 pupils in with 95% EAL intake on 2 sites.) They'll be asked to only refer to their region not town. These will also be pre-moderated by the project team to ensure no school or pupil names are included.

Can you guarantee the schools anonymity?

We cannot guarantee the school's anonymity. Making these data and reports publically available should not result in schools being identifiable. However, the website, data and reports will be online, and therefore it may be possible that students, teachers or the public are able to identify or recognise a school and then externally link to their lab logs or reports (which we cannot control). To counter this our team will monitor inbound links to the website and data, which will help maintain an individual school's anonymity, however, we cannot guarantee this.

What should I do next?

The study is part of your child's normal educational experience and you do not need to do anything as a result of receiving this information sheet. We are only collecting data on year groups and the school as whole, and not on individual children, and as a result there is no personal information involved. However, we believe that letting parents and carers know that the school is participating in a project like this can only help which is why we have sent you this information sheet.

Got more questions?

If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researchers via email flu@deciphermydata.org.uk or phone 01225 326892. You should keep a copy of this Information Sheet to refer to at any time.