###### Participant information sheet

You are being invited to take part in an interview or a survey as part of research into the challenges that public health laboratories faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how to make these laboratories more prepared for future public health threats related to respiratory infectious diseases, as part of a study commissioned by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Before you decide if you are willing to be interviewed or to take part in the survey, it is important for you to understand why this study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Data protection

All data collection and processing will adhere to GSR requirements, including ethics and GDPR compliance, supported by RAND Europe’s ISO27001 certification. RAND Europe have an in-house GDPR team, a dedicated Data Protection Officer, an Ethics Advisory Group and an ISO standards committee to ensure compliance. All discussions and materials from interviews and surveys will be treated confidentially

Study aims

The purpose of this study is to provide evidence to ECDC and key stakeholders around how to help public health laboratories be more prepared and resilient in the face of future public health challenges related to respiratory infectious diseases.

The guiding research questions for this study are:

1. What were the main challenges public health laboratories faced during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What solutions were implemented by public health laboratories to address these challenges?
3. What were the impacts and implications of the solutions implemented by public health laboratories?
4. What is necessary to sustain the advances made during the COVID-19 pandemic in public health laboratory preparedness?
5. How can the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic be utilised to enhance public health laboratory preparedness for other respiratory infectious diseases and potential new pandemics?
6. What long-term strategies should be developed to ensure public health laboratories remain resilient and adaptable in the face of future public health threats?

Participation details

We invite you to participate in an interview or survey to inform our understanding of the challenges that public health laboratories faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how to make these laboratories more prepared for future public health threats related to respiratory infectious disease. We are interested to learn from your professional knowledge and experience as a stakeholder in this field. Your participation in an interview or survey would be invaluable.

If you decide to take part in an interview or survey, a member of the research team will send you a consent form to complete and will arrange a convenient time to speak to you. The interview will be conducted via an online platform (Microsoft Teams) and is expected to last 60 minutes. The survey should not take more than 20 minutes to complete.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is your choice whether to participate or not. You can also withdraw from the project even after you have agreed to take part without giving a reason. You can withdraw up to two weeks after you have participated in an interview, and there are no consequences for withdrawing. If you do decide to withdraw, your data will be destroyed and will not be used in analysis or reporting. If you do wish to withdraw after the interview please contact the project manager, whose details are given towards the end of this participant information sheet. Our researchers are happy to discuss any concerns you might have before, during or after the interview to ensure that you are comfortable with the way that we will use and report the comments you make.

Are there possible disadvantages of taking part?

All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. We will not use your name or any other information that could be used to identify you in any publications from the study. We will remove any potentially identifiable information, including names of employers, individuals and specific roles within organisations. We will also confirm any direct (anonymous) quotes, should these be used in the report. However, we cannot entirely remove the possibility that readers may identify you.

What will happen to the results of the study?

We will produce a publicly available report with the results of the study, which will be published by ECDC, and in an academic journal article. We will also publish our findings on the RAND Europe website.

How will the information that i share be kept confidentially?

We will ask your permission to digitally record the interview. Recording ensures that we capture your comments and perspectives accurately. Detailed notes will be taken of the interview, and the recording will be referenced as needed. Everything that you say will be treated confidentially and will only be seen by members of the research team. We may use things that you have said in the interview or survey in our reports and other outputs from the evaluation, but we will not use your name or mention any details by which you could be identified.

Data will be held on a secure server. Back-ups taken for disaster recovery purposes will be encrypted and stored in a secure offline site. The data linking your identity to the interview or survey will be stored for one year after completion of the project and then destroyed.

**Thank you for considering participating in an interview or survey.**