###### Participant information sheet

You are being invited to take part in a technical meeting 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. This meeting is part of a study commissioned by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) to RAND Europe. Before you decide to partake in this technical meeting, 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, and ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Study aims

The purpose of this study is to provide evidence to ECDC and key stakeholders in public health around how public health laboratories can 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 have invited you to participate in a technical meeting 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 this would be invaluable. If you decide to take part in the technical meeting, a member of the research team will provide further details about the meeting, including a short 2-4 page briefing.

The meeting will be conducted via an online platform (Microsoft Teams) on 18th March 2025, from 10am-3pm CET. It is expected to last 5 hours, including a 1 hour lunch break, and will include a short presentation from the research team, along with small group and plenary discussions.

Before and after the meeting, you will have the chance to provide additional views via an online consultation form. You can respond to this online consultation whether you participate in the technical meeting or not.

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 the meeting, and there are no consequences for withdrawing. If you do decide to withdraw, your personal data will be destroyed and will not be used in analysis or reporting. As notes will be taken in aggregate, however, it may not be possible to remove all of your individual contributions from our notes. If you do wish to withdraw after the meeting please contact the project manager, whose details are given at the end of this participant information sheet.

Our researchers are happy to discuss any concerns you might have before, during or after the meeting 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 from the technical meeting will be reported in aggregate, and no one besides those in the meeting will know what you individually contributed or said during the meeting. 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, and we cannot guarantee that other participants keep information confidential (although we will request this at the start of the meeting).

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 meeting. Recording ensures that we capture your comments and perspectives accurately. Detailed notes will be taken of the meeting, 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, ECDC and other participants of the meeting. We may use things that you have said in the meeting 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 technical meeting will be stored for one year after completion of the project and then destroyed.

Data protection

All data collection and processing will adhere to GDPR, supported by RAND Europe’s ISO27001 certification. RAND Europe have an in-house team, a dedicated Data Protection Officer, an Ethics Advisory Group and an ISO standards committee to ensure compliance. All discussions and materials from meeting will be treated confidentially. If you would like further information about how the data from this meeting is being used, please contact RAND Europe’s Data Protection officer at REDPO@randeurope.org.

Contact for further information

Please contact sparkins@randeurope.org or smoriarty@randeurope.org if you have any questions about the study or the technical meeting. If you would like to take part in the meeting, then please respond to the invitation sent by email.

**Thank you for considering participating in the technical meeting.**