



Participant Information Sheet

1. Study title

Good germs, bad germs: a participatory model for mapping the domestic microbiome

CUREC reference number: SOGE 16 1A-8

2. Background and aims of the study

Human bodies, homes and cities support huge amounts of microbial life. These organisms are generally thought of as disease-causing 'germs' that should be eradicated through antibiotic chemicals and hygiene practices. But recent developments in 'metagenomics' – the sequencing of genetic material taken from the environment – have begun to reveal the importance of the microbial life in, on and around us.

The everyday invisibility of microbial life can make it difficult to comprehend. Metagenomic techniques help to visualise microbial life, and to identify changes in microbial worlds with possible implications for human health (for example, relating to allergies, autoimmunity and antibiotic resistance).

This project aims to develop a 'participatory' model of metagenomics, in which project participants can cooperate in the design, creation and interpretation of maps of the microbial life in their kitchens. The wider aim is to explore the transformative potential of metagenomic science for developing new understandings of domestic hygiene and associated behaviours. This is important because there is a growing popular and policy interest in the microbiome, and the possibilities (and impossibilities) of more nuanced or 'probiotic' ways of living with germs.

The project thus has three objectives:

- (1) To examine peoples' understandings of hygiene and the domestic microbiome.
- (2) To undertake collaborative experiments in visualising and managing the domestic microbiome;
- (3) To investigate the implications of these experiments for organisations responsible for governing domestic hygiene.

The project is being run by Dr Jamie Lorimer, Associate Professor in Human Geography at the University of Oxford's School of Geography and the Environment. He can be reached at jamie.lorimer@ouce.ox.ac.uk

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you have indicated an interest in learning more about microbial life in the home, and because you live within the catchment area of this project (the city of Oxford). We can only include people who can speak English as we are unable to employ translators. You must be over the age of 16 and able to consent to taking part (see the attached 'consent form'). Unfortunately, we cannot include people who have health conditions that mean they are either: (i) immunocompromised, or (ii) predisposed to be unusually distressed about germs. If either of these applies to you, please tell the researcher immediately.

4. Do I have to take part?

This project is voluntary. You can ask questions about the project before deciding whether to participate. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw yourself and your data from the study at any time, and without giving a reason, by advising the research team of this decision.

5. What will happen in the study?

If you are happy to take part in this project, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will then be invited to participate in a series of events over the next year. These will include:

6 **'surveys'**, where you will select areas of your kitchen to explore for microbial life. The research team will show you how to survey these areas using swabs that they will provide. The research team will then collect the swabs and conduct analyses on the samples. The results of this analysis will be visualised and returned to you on email before the next group meeting (see below).

6 **'group meetings'**, to be held in Florence park Community Centre. The group meetings will be held at 6-8 week intervals on dates to be confirmed, always on weekday evenings starting at 7pm, and will last approximately 1.5 hours (and never more than 2 hours). During these meetings, you will be asked to contribute to discussions about microbial life; you will be able to participate in designing surveys of your kitchen; you will be invited to discuss, interpret and develop the microbial maps generated from previous survey; and you will be able to ask questions of both the research team and invited 'experts' on the domestic microbiome. Refreshments will be provided.

3 **interviews**, to be held at your home, with 1-2 of the research team. These will take around 45 minutes each. One interview will take place at the start of the project, another after around 5 months, and the last after around 10 months. At these interviews, you will be asked questions about your attitudes towards microbial life, and how you manage microbes in your kitchen. The later interviews will invite reflections on the project.

1 **workshop**. At the end of the project, you will be invited to attend a half-day workshop to discuss the outcomes of the project. This will be held in London, and relevant travel costs will be covered.

6. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

All research projects involve some form of risk. In this project, there are two types; in both cases, the research team have developed protocols to minimise both the risk and the potential consequences. First, there is a small risk involved in collecting microbial samples and trying out new cleaning and cooking practices. The project team will provide instruction in how to collect samples safely, and will provide briefing materials that set out government guidelines on safe cleaning and cooking practices. Second, there is a small risk that visualising microbial life will create anxiety in participants. The project team will provide briefing materials (attached) of who to contact for health and hygiene advice should such anxieties develop.

There are also benefits to taking part. These include being involved in (and helping to design) a ground-breaking, year-long citizen science project, with significant access to scientific experts and metagenomic testing facilities.

7. What happens to the research data provided?

All the **personal data** necessary for running the project (names, contact addresses) will be stored securely by the University and will not be used for purposes beyond this project. All these data will be deleted two years after the project has completed.

We will remove your name and anything that could identify you or members of your household from records of: (i) your responses in interviews, (ii) your contributions to the group meetings, (iii) any visual material (obscuring faces and identifying details from photos), and (iv) the microbial maps generated in



the project. These records will be stored securely by the University during the project, and added to one or more of the secure national archives at the end of the project.

8. Will the research be published?

We will use the findings from the study to write articles and conference presentations.

9. Who has reviewed this project?

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC); its CUREC reference number is SOGE 16 1A-8.

The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The ESRC is “the UK’s largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues”; and is a “non-departmental public body” that receives “most of its funding through the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills” (see www.esrc.ac.uk).

10. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, please speak to Dr Jamie Lorimer (01865 275841; jamie.lorimer@ouce.ox.ac.uk) who will do his best to answer your query. He should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how he intends to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford (using the contact details below) who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**;
Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford,
Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD