

# NEWSLETTER



## Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of the INTERVAL Newsletter

It is vital that we share our learnings with blood donors and that we listen to you when planning our research. We hope you find these newsletters and our other activities informative and interesting. **Thank you for working with us and being an important part of INTERVAL!**

### Blood and Transplant Research Unit (BTRU) in Donor Health and Behaviour

For six and a half years our 'Blood Donors Studies'—INTERVAL, COMPARE and STRIDES—were managed by the Blood and Transplant Research Unit (BTRU) in Donor Health and *Genomics*. The funding for that Unit has now ended and we are delighted to announce that we have secured five years of funding for the BTRU in Donor Health and *Behaviour*. The Unit is a partnership between the University of Cambridge and NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT), working in collaboration with the Universities of Oxford, Nottingham and Queensland and the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood.

The Unit will continue investigating ways to improve blood donor health and ensure a steady supply of blood to the NHS. It will conduct research to address major challenges identified by NHSBT, such as finding ways to encourage a more ethnically diverse range of people to donate blood, developing new methods for recruiting and retaining donors, promoting safe and effective donation practices and identifying risks of adverse health effects on blood donation.

We will be updating the website ([www.donorhealth-btru.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.donorhealth-btru.nihr.ac.uk)) over the next few months and we encourage you to visit to learn more about who we are, what we are researching and how you can work with us.

Read the press release about the five new BTRUs: <https://tinyurl.com/7fpz5a6z>

### Animation about the INTERVAL Study

The INTERVAL study recruited around 45,000 blood donors aged 18 years and upwards from 25 centres in England between 2012 and 2014. Men were randomly assigned to give blood at three different intervals of frequency: 8-, 10- or 12-weeks between each donation and women were randomly allocated to give blood at 12-, 14- or



16-week intervals. The study is incredibly important for three reasons: (1) the samples and data are part of our Blood Donors Studies BioResource, which is enabling researchers to study a wide variety of health issues, (2) it resolved longstanding debates about how frequently blood can be safely collected and underpins NHSBT's policy of a maximum donation frequency of every 12 and 16 weeks for men and women, respectively and (3) it showed that, in times of high blood demand, people could safely donate more frequently over a short time period.

We have created an animation to help more people understand the study and its impact. We hope you enjoy it! [YouTube, ~2 min]: <https://tinyurl.com/3fv9kybr>

## **Blood Donors Studies BioResource – did you know?**

- The BioResource includes information linked to health outcomes for blood donors recruited into the INTERVAL, COMPARE and STRIDES studies.
- Participants in our Blood Donors Studies agreed for their de-personalised data to be used for health-related research purposes.
- The BioResource supports population health and biomedical research by providing access to de-personalised data from this large group of healthy volunteers.
- It includes information collected from questionnaires and retrieved from NHSBT and electronic health records, and data on physical activity, cognitive function, DNA sequencing and measurements of iron, haemoglobin, proteins, metabolites and lipids.
- Requests to access the de-personalised data are reviewed by a Data Access Committee that includes members of the public.

Find out more about our BioResource, including the Data Access Policy and research projects using the data: [www.donorhealth-btru.nihr.ac.uk/project/bioresource](http://www.donorhealth-btru.nihr.ac.uk/project/bioresource)

## **Linking INTERVAL data to electronic health records**

To help understand the health of participants in the INTERVAL study, and to track how this changes over time, we use medical and other health-related records. We currently receive data about hospital treatment and information on Deaths and Cancer diagnoses. We are also receiving General Practice (GP) records, Stroke Audit data and COVID-19 Vaccination and Antibody testing data for COVID-19 research. For example, linkage to health data will allow researchers to evaluate the long-term impact of COVID-19 infection, vaccination and antibody levels in participants that have been hospitalised due to COVID-19 infection or long-term illness.

## **TRACK-COVID study**

In May 2020 we began recruiting individuals into our new study, TRACK-COVID ([www.trackcovid.org.uk](http://www.trackcovid.org.uk)), which aims to: (1) determine the risk factors for infection of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and (2) investigate why only some people have symptoms. The primary aim is to understand the frequency and evolution of symptoms compatible with COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. The secondary aim is to define and monitor the evolution of antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 infection and vaccines. ~20,000

individuals previously recruited into the INTERVAL, COMPARE and STRIDES studies have consented and provided COVID-19-related information using an online questionnaire. Participants answered this questionnaire on a monthly basis until December 2021, which will generate useful data for analysing symptoms associated with new COVID-19 variants (i.e., Alpha, Delta, etc). A subset of ~15,000 participants provided six weekly capillary blood samples which will be analysed for COVID-19 antibodies.

TRACK-COVID is participating in the UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration (UK LLC; <https://ukllc.ac.uk>). This collaboration brings together de-identified study information linked to routine health and administrative records. The data is stored securely in the UK LLC Trusted Research Environment (TRE). Our researchers have recently obtained approval to access the TRACK-COVID data in the UK LLC TRE. This will enable access to a wide range of datasets for COVID-19 research.

## **BTRU in Donor Health and Behaviour – Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE)**

PPIE is an important part of our research activities. *Involvement* means that activities and research are carried out 'with' or 'by' members of the public or patients, rather than 'to', 'about' or 'for' them. *Engagement* means that information and outcomes from research or activities are disseminated to patients and the public. Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in research will help ensure that everyone has a voice and will improve healthcare for all.

We currently work with blood donors, regularly transfused patients and members of the public to ensure that our research is answering the right questions and appropriate for the public, as well as the blood service. Our 'Public Contributors' sit on study and management committees and working groups for specific projects; they provide feedback on study materials (such as Patient Information Leaflets) and animations; and they help us with events and other activities. If you are interested in working with us, please email Sarah: [donorhealth@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:donorhealth@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

Find out more about the Unit and our studies: [www.donorhealth-btru.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.donorhealth-btru.nihr.ac.uk)

Visit our YouTube channel to learn more about our research:  
[www.youtube.com/channel/UCeS9CPB2\\_QGcBsnORnNQyiQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeS9CPB2_QGcBsnORnNQyiQ)

Follow us on Twitter: @DonorHealthBTRU

If you would like to learn more about getting involved in research in general, please visit this new Starting Out Guide from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR):  
[www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/Starting-Out-Guide/30145](http://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/Starting-Out-Guide/30145)

As an INTERVAL participant we will continue to update you on the study. Published papers will be posted on our website: [www.intervalstudy.org.uk/publications](http://www.intervalstudy.org.uk/publications) and we'll let you know, by email, when they are available. To make sure you receive our emails, please let us know, by emailing: [donorhealth@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:donorhealth@medschl.cam.ac.uk), if you change your contact details.