

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Citizen scientists to track allergies with new smartphone app

Members of the public are invited to download a free app to track their seasonal allergy symptoms and to help researchers understand more about why the frequency of allergies is increasing.

A new and improved version of the app that allows users to track their seasonal allergies as part of a major research project, has been launched today, both on Android and iOS, allowing even more users to take part.

The 2017 version of the #BritainBreathing app will allow people to record and track their allergic responses in real time, with the data collected then shared anonymously with scientists working to understand more about allergies in the UK.

The app has been produced collaboratively by The University of Manchester, the Royal Society of Biology and the British Society for Immunology.

Researchers still do not understand why the number of people suffering from seasonal allergies, such as hay fever and asthma, is on the rise, but they think it may be linked to environmental changes such as pollen counts, the weather or an increase in air pollutants.

The app is part of the first ever nationwide citizen science project looking to build up a picture of how allergic symptoms change over time. Data collected from members of the public will allow researchers to pinpoint allergy hotspots in the UK and times of the year that allergies are at their most severe, and to correlate this with environmental data.

With around one in four people in the UK suffering from seasonal allergies, and with 5.4 million people with asthma in the UK, the app could add a great deal of valuable new data about the environmental conditions that are associated with triggering allergic responses and breathing difficulties including asthma attacks.

Dr Sheena Cruickshank, from The University of Manchester and British Society for Immunology, said:

“We launched #BritainBreathing last year to work with the public to help us to learn more about seasonal allergies, such as hay fever and asthma. Gathering this type of information via an app from a large cross-section of the public hasn’t been done before, so our first move was to establish how valid our data was. We were pleased to find that the #BritainBreathing app provides strong data that we can use to see patterns of allergy and really unpick how they are caused.

“We know that more people than ever are suffering from seasonal allergies, but we don’t understand why this is. It could be pollution, super pollens, increased cleanliness, or a combination of factors. For our second year, with the help of the public, we hope gain a better picture of the driving forces behind why seasonal allergies are on the rise.”

Dr Laura Bellingan FRSB, director of policy and public affairs at the Royal Society of Biology, said of the project: “This project breaks new ground and has tremendous potential to bring people’s daily experience to the attention of researchers in a very useable way.

“The #BritainBreathing app is one of several citizen science projects with which we’ve been involved. The public have shown real enthusiasm for scientific research and can make an invaluable contribution that does not require prior training but draws on innate knowledge and experience, and as such we are very happy to be able to support this project.

“I would encourage anyone with a smartphone to get involved and to help us understand whether the air we breathe is the air we need.”

The #BritainBreathing project is now in its second year, with over 1,500 users downloading the app last year to record their symptoms. Researchers are hoping that with this new dataset they will also be able to put together a comparative analysis and see how allergic responses are changing year on year. We’ll provide regular updates to users to keep them informed on how the project is progressing.

The free app is available for Android and iOS phones. Those who already have the 2016 Android version of the app are encouraged to delete it and replace with this updated version as data recorded in older versions will not be sent to the research team.

You can find a more detailed project update and more information on the findings from the 2016 season of #BritainBreathing [here](#).

[Download](#) the app on Android

[Download](#) the app on iOS

Find out more on the #BritainBreathing website: www.britainbreathing.org

Follow the project on Twitter: [@BritBreathing](https://twitter.com/BritBreathing)

Additional material:

#BritainBreathing Logo: <http://bit.ly/1QJWQf2>

Watch our videos to learn more about the project:

- [Launch video](#)
- [Citizen science video](#)

Images are available on creative commons:

Sneeze: <http://bit.ly/2qrhsSC>

Grass: <https://flic.kr/p/JaTX2>

Pollen: <https://flic.kr/p/apPMng>

Plane tree: <https://flic.kr/p/x2KaNd>

Flower: <https://flic.kr/p/5TfmJB>

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The **British Society for Immunology** is the UK organisation representing scientists and clinicians who study the immune system. Our mission is to promote excellence in immunological research, scholarship and clinical practice in order to improve human and animal health. Website: www.immunology.org; Twitter: [@britsocimm](https://twitter.com/britsocimm)

The **University of Manchester**, a member of the prestigious Russell Group, is the UK's largest single-site university with 38,600 students and is consistently ranked among the world's elite for graduate employability. The University is also one of the country's major research institutions, rated fifth in the UK in terms of 'research power' (REF 2014). World class research is carried out across a diverse range of fields including cancer, advanced materials, addressing global inequalities, energy and industrial biotechnology.

No fewer than 25 Nobel laureates have either worked or studied here.

It is the only UK university to have social responsibility among its core strategic objectives, with staff and students alike dedicated to making a positive difference in communities around the world.

Manchester is ranked 35th in the world in the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2016 and 5th in the UK. The University had an annual income of almost £1 billion in 2015/16.

Visit www.manchester.ac.uk for further information.

Facts and figures: <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/facts-figures/>

Research Beacons: <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/beacons/>

The **Royal Society of Biology**: www.rsb.org.uk

The Royal Society of Biology is a single unified voice for biology: advising Government and influencing policy; advancing education and professional development; supporting our members, and engaging and encouraging public interest in the life sciences. The Society represents a diverse membership of individuals, learned societies and other organisations.

Funding

To develop the #BritainBreathing app was provided jointly by the British Society for Immunology, The University of Manchester Faculty of Life Sciences, BBSRC Activating Impact award and the Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund. Funding for the initial app workshops was provided by a grant awarded to the Health eResearch Centre by the Medical Research Council.

