

HORIZONS: A Status Checks Guide

The purpose of a 'Status Check'

HORIZONS is a longitudinal cohort study and we aim to follow participants for up to five years. Before we contact participants, we want to be as sure as possible that we have the right address for them and that it is still appropriate to contact them. Therefore, we do a status check before sending HORIZONS questionnaires etc. to any participant. The status check involves us asking the team at their recruiting hospital whether the participant is:

- alive
- still living at the same address

Aim of this guide

As we move beyond the first year of follow-up, we realise it might become difficult to find up-to-date information about some participants, for example those who have been discharged from hospital. As a result, staff in our recruiting hospitals are not always able to provide a status check.

We are very grateful for the emails and phone calls that we've received from recruiting staff about this problem. We've taken advice about the best way to proceed and, based on the advice, have developed this guide to status check best practice. The procedures described in the guide have been approved by our Research Ethics Committee (REC). The guide takes into account the workload of staff in our recruiting hospitals, as well as recognising the need to maximise the number of accurate status checks we receive and the need to give all participants the chance to complete a follow-up questionnaire.

To summarise, if no up-to-date information about a participant is available to staff in a hospital that has recruited to HORIZONS, the participant's GP should be contacted and asked if the participant is alive and living at the same address. If no information is available from the participant's GP, the HORIZONS team should be informed. The HORIZONS team will then send the participant their follow up questionnaire, together with a covering notice explaining that, on this occasion it was not possible to check on the participant's status before sending the questionnaire.

What to do if there is no up to date information about a HORIZONS participant

Please use when a HORIZONS participant has not attended hospital for 6 months or more and there is no up to date information about their address and status available in the hospital records

1. Find the name and contact details of the participant's GP practice
2. (do not address it to their GP, address it to the practice)
3. Populate the **HORIZONS Status Update Check Cover Letter & Reply Slip – GPs** with details of the HORIZONS participant you are enquiring about and your own contact details.
4. Make a copy of the participant's Consent Form.
5. Send the Status Update Check Cover Letter and Reply Slip, plus the participant's Consent Form to the participant's GP by fax, email or post.



TIP: it may be useful to telephone the GP surgery first, to ask whether they would prefer to receive your request by fax, email or post.

6. If no response has been received from the participant's GP **within 10 working days** (two weeks), send a reminder, or telephone to remind them.
7. When the requested information is returned to you, email the HORIZONS Co-ordinating Centre with the details.
8. If the requested information is not returned **within 5 working days** of your reminder, please inform the HORIZONS Co-ordinating Centre of 'No Status Available'.