



## **Early detection of rheumatoid arthritis (SCREEN-RA)**

"Dear participants!

***Please note that the "SCREEN-RA" study uses a new program for the yearly questionnaire. So do not be surprised if the 2020 questionnaire looks different than before.***

***We are grateful for your ongoing participation.***

Your participation is valuable to us. The interest of the study lies in the long-term follow-up, because we want to understand which factors protect or, on the contrary, provoke the development of the disease. We therefore thank you for your perseverance and for the care you take in completing the annual questionnaire!

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We hope that you have gone through this COVID-19 pandemic period without too much difficulty. It has been / and still is a difficult time. Especially for patients with autoimmune diseases (rheumatoid arthritis or other), it has been trying, as it requires special precautions, since patients with weakened immunological state may be more vulnerable to a severe evolution.

In this newsletter, we will briefly discuss the role that viral infection such as COVID-19 might play in the development of RA, in other words - the role that viruses might have in triggering RA.

On the other hand, we would like to inform you that all research activity has been completely stopped in recent months (analytical laboratories closed, recruitment stopped, etc.). As a result, some of our analyses may be delayed, and we thank you in advance for your understanding. In particular, this spring we launched an ambitious project to analyse the digestive microbiota as a risk factor for RA with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), a program that also had to be interrupted. However, depending on the availability of the various participating centres, we were able to restart stool collection for this exciting project. As a reminder, the aim is to better understand the role of intestinal bacteria on the development of RA, and we are offering to give us a stool sample to analyse its composition. You can find more information on our website ([http://www.arthritis-checkup.ch/faq\\_fr%2001\\_2020.pdf](http://www.arthritis-checkup.ch/faq_fr%2001_2020.pdf)) or on our Facebook page. Thank you in advance for your support of this project.

**Prof. Axel FINCKH**

Participate in our study: We would be delighted to include you in our stool collection; if you wish, please contact [arthritis-checkup@hcuge.ch](mailto:arthritis-checkup@hcuge.ch), indicating your address so that we can refer you to the nearest center. A new generation stool collection kit will then be sent to you and an appointment for a blood test will be scheduled. A nutrition questionnaire will also be sent to participants.

## The Viruses

Are viruses involved in triggering autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA)? This question has long been on the minds of scientists. Indeed, observations of seasonal peaks in new RA cases suggest that viral infections may be a trigger for this disease. In some individuals, poor infection control and chronic exposure to viral antigens may be the source of a chronic inflammatory response leading to the development of early RA symptoms. However, to date, investigations have been inconclusive for viruses such as Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), herpes viruses (HHV-6), endoviruses (HERV) or parvovirus B19.

Our research team continues with perseverance to identify the factors that protect or, on the contrary, provoke the development of the disease. This unprecedented pandemic period gives us the opportunity to study the potential impact of infection with a novel coronavirus (COVID-19/SARS-Cov2) in the onset of RA. We have taken the liberty of adding a few questions specifically dedicated to COVID-19 in your questionnaire. The information collected will allow us to advance our understanding of this disease.

**Doc. Lamacchia Céline**

*Biologiste HUG*

## Acknowledgments

My entire team and I would like to thank you personally for your support of this project.



We would also like to warmly thank the Swiss rheumatology hospitals for their collaboration.

Prof. Axel FINCKH

Web Site : [www.arthritis-checkup.ch](http://www.arthritis-checkup.ch)

The next newsletter should reach you in October 2020.