



GerES VI

German Environmental Survey for Adults

For our environment

Umwelt 
Bundesamt



Dear fellow citizens,
we cordially invite you to participate in the German Environment Agency's German Environmental Survey for Adults – GerES VI.

„For our environment“ is the motto of the German Environment Agency. As Germany's central environmental protection authority, we are committed to

ensuring that Germany has a healthy environment in which people can live, shielded as far as possible from harmful environmental impacts.

We therefore regularly conduct environmental surveys and research the potentially harmful substances and environmental impacts that people in this country come into contact with.

Scientific questions such as

- How high is the exposure of the adult population in Germany to environmental pollutants?
- Which pollutant sources and pathways are relevant?
- Are there any population groups that are particularly affected?
- Is there any evidence of health effects?

are investigated as part of the process.

Around 1,500 other people aged 18 to 79 across Germany are set to participate – your participation is therefore important! Due to the large number and targeted selection of participants, we can draw conclusions about the environmental impact on the entire population from the results. The findings of the survey therefore serve as a basis for decisions on rules and laws to protect people and the environment as well.

We analyse your data exclusively for scientific purposes and, of course, adhere to all requirements of the European General Data Protection Regulation and the Federal Data Protection Act. If you request us to do so, we will notify you of the results of the measurements we have taken. Read more about this on the following pages.

I therefore ask you to participate – for a better and healthier environment in Germany.

Yours sincerely

Dirk Messner
President of the German Environment Agency

What is GerES VI?

In conducting the German Environmental Survey for Adults – GerES VI, the German Environment Agency is collecting up-to-date information on the environmental pollution affecting the adult population in Germany and examining chemical, biological and physical pollution in participants' homes and the areas where they live.

The forms of pollution affecting our health are constantly changing. That is why the German Environment Agency has been conducting the German Environmental Survey regularly for almost 40 years.

The abbreviation GerES is short for **German Environmental Survey**. After examining children and young people in the two previous surveys, we are once again turning our attention in GerES VI to the adult population in Germany. As part of this survey, data will be collected from around 1,500 people aged 18 to 79 during the period from 2023 to 2024.

Why is GerES VI necessary?

We require reliable pollution data in order to protect people from negative environmental impacts. This survey will help to ensure that action to reduce and prevent pollution can be taken. It has been more than 20 years since the last environmental survey of adults was conducted, and therefore up-to-date data on the pollution exposure of adults in Germany is urgently needed.

By participating, you are personally making an important contribution to the protection of the environment and health.

What is being examined?

As part of GerES VI, we will be testing samples of **drinking water, urine, blood, dust, and air for environmental pollutants** and analysing them, together with questionnaires and general environmental data relevant to where you live.

To this end we would like to

- take **drinking water samples from your household**,
- a **morning urine sample** collected by you and
- a **blood sample** from you and test them for various environmental pollutants,
- ask you **questions** that may provide **information about pollution**,
- record the **geographical coordinates of your residential address**, so that we can link general environmental data such as traffic or noise data to the area where you live,
- ascertain your height and weight, and measure your blood pressure.



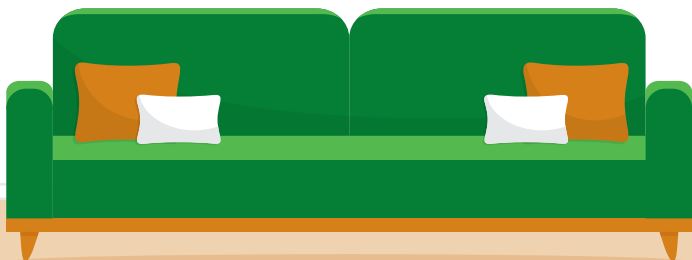
For some of you, we would also like to

- check the **contents of your vacuum-cleaner bag** for pollutants, or
- test the **indoor air in your home** for volatile pollutants, or
- ascertain the **fine dust content** of the indoor and outdoor air, or
- ascertain the **mould contamination** in indoor and outdoor air as well as in house dust.

If we have scheduled you for one of these additional examinations, we will let you know in good time.

We perform chemical analyses on the collected samples. As part of this process, we identify environmental pollutants that can affect health, such as heavy metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, plasticisers from plastics, solvents, flame retardants and pesticides.

If you give us your consent, your samples can also be analysed for other environmental chemicals once the survey has been completed, either by us or by German and international scientific cooperation partners.



What awaits you?

- 1** We need your **written consent for your participation**. You will receive the consent form in advance.
- 2** If you participate in GerES VI, Infratrend Forschung GmbH or Verian employees will visit you at home on a **date agreed with you** in advance.
- 3** We invite you to **clarify any questions you may have** with us or with Telquest GmbH's hotline staff **before-hand**. You will find our contact details at the end of the brochure or in your invitation letter.
- 4** We will send you the **sample containers** as well as detailed **explanations** on sampling **in good time** before we visit you.
- 5** You will also receive **four questionnaires** in advance, which you can **complete at your leisure** and give to us when we visit. In these questionnaires, we request you to provide information about yourself, your health, your home, and your household, and about the weather and climate.
- 6** Our **visit** lasts about **two to two and a half hours**. We are happy to answer your questions, take receipt of the **morning urine and drinking water samples** you have collected and **ask you** about issues that may be of interest, if you are exposed to pollutants.
- 7** About 1-2 weeks after the interview, medical professionals will visit you at home at a time previously **agreed with you**. They will take a blood sample, measure your blood pressure, and ask you questions relevant to the



blood sample. The visit will last about 30-45 minutes.

- 8** Our **visits save you effort, expense** and travel, and our expertise enables us to assist you on site with providing the requested information.

In some cases, we will also carry out one of the following examinations:

■ **Pollutants in house dust**

If you use a vacuum-cleaner bag, we would like to take it with us, if it is at least one third full when we visit.

■ **Volatile pollutants in indoor air**

We hang small air collectors in your home and provide you with small devices for measuring temperature and humidity. You can seal these yourself a week later and return them to us in the stamped, addressed envelope.

■ **Fine dust content of indoor and outdoor air**

We set up measuring devices for this purpose during another short visit and collect them again a week later.

■ **Mould contamination in house dust, indoor and outdoor air**

For this examination, we also need a vacuum-cleaner bag that is at least one third full. We ascertain mould spore levels in the outdoor air, your house dust and in your bedroom air. We also measure room temperature and humidity in your bedroom. For some households, we also want to use a mould detection sniffer dog when we visit again.



What are the benefits for you?

Upon request, you will receive an **environmental medical assessment** of your metrics, provided assessment criteria are available for them. This will tell you whether they are unusually high, based on current scientific knowledge, or even give reason for health concerns.

By participating in GerES VI, you can find out whether, for example, your drinking water complies with the threshold for lead or whether the plasticiser content in your urine exceeds health assessment values.

All analyses are free of charge to you!

These are conducted in specialist laboratories and are not part of the normal examination programme offered by medical practices. They are **very extensive and time-consuming**, meaning we can only provide you with the results **after about four to six months**.



As a **thank you** for participating in the survey, you will receive an **expense allowance of €20**. You will also receive another €10 when you give a blood sample.

Why were you chosen?

Using a **random procedure**, you were selected – as being representative of your age group and of the population in your place of residence – via the residents' registration office in your municipality. This representative selection will enable us to draw conclusions about the entire adult population in Germany.

It is important,

that, as far as possible, all invitees take part in the survey.

By participating, you are contributing substantially to the success of this survey and helping us all to gain new insights into the environmental pollution affecting the population in this country. This way, you are supporting environmental health protection in our country.

Is participation voluntary? Can I rescind it?

Your participation in GerES VI is **voluntary and free of charge**. You will not be disadvantaged in any way if you do not participate.

Even if you have given your consent, you can withdraw from participating in the survey, even partially, at any time without giving reasons. We will then no longer contact you in the future and will delete your name, address and contact details from the protected personal file.

Furthermore, if you request us to do so, we will also delete the data collected to date and destroy your samples. However, once we have deleted your address data, it is no longer possible to delete your survey data and destroy your samples.

Even if you revoke your consent, you will not be disadvantaged in any way.

Please send any revocation either in writing to:

German Environmental Survey for Adults GerES VI

German Environment Agency (UBA)
Corrensplatz 1
14195 Berlin

Or by phone or email to the GerES hotline staff at Telquest GmbH:

Phone: 0800 1121 139

E-mail: GerES@telquest.de

Who conducts the German Environmental Survey and how is it financed?

The German Environment Agency is the central environmental protection authority in Germany and is conducting GerES VI. The German Environment Agency has commissioned Diamond (KH) Germany HoldCo GmbH, a subsidiary of Cerner Deutschland GmbH, to perform the GerES VI fieldwork.

Both Cerner Deutschland GmbH and Diamond (KH) Germany HoldCo GmbH belong to the Oracle Corporation group of companies.

Oracle Life Sciences is a Diamond (KH) Germany HoldCo GmbH brand and is used in the text below and in communications (e.g., e-mail addresses).

GerES VI's fieldwork essentially involves interviews and sampling at your home. To enable coordination and performance of these tasks, Oracle Life Sciences is partnering with various companies (see figure 1, insert) that have many years of experience in specific areas. The interviewers and the medical professionals who carry out the interviews and sampling are employed by Infratrend Forschung GmbH and Verian.

Furthermore, the German Environment Agency has commissioned specialised laboratories to measure pollutant levels in the samples.

GerES VI is financed by the German Environment Agency and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection.

You can find out which companies process and store your data and for what purpose in the green-shaded section on data protection below.

Data protection and data handling

The information you provide and the results of the analyses are treated as strictly confidential by all German Environment Agency staff involved in the survey and by the companies and institutes commissioned to conduct the survey and analyse the samples. No one can tell from the analyses which person provided the information.

The German Environment Agency's data protection officer has been informed about the project. We follow their recommendations.

All persons involved in conducting the survey are obliged to comply with the relevant data protection laws.

For as long as your data and samples can be matched to you personally, you have the right at any time to view all the information of yours that we store, to revoke your consent to the storage of data and to demand the destruction of your samples. You can contact the data protection officer at any time.

Even if you do not participate in the survey, your personal data, which we have received from the residents' registration office in your municipality in accordance with §46 of the Federal Registration Act, will be processed and completely deleted by no later than the survey's completion date. You have the right to view all the information of yours that we store at any time and to request the early deletion of your data.

How is your data encrypted?

In accordance with data protection regulations, your data will be encrypted (pseudonymised) using a random 6-digit participant number that does not contain any personal details that can reveal your identity.

What happens to your address data?

Your name, address, details concerning your age, gender and nationality and, if available, telephone numbers as well as, in case you provide these to us, your e-mail address, further telephone numbers and details concerning your availability, will only be available for the purposes and duration of the survey, i.e., until approximately the end of 2025, to Oracle Life Sciences (Diamond (KH) Germany HoldCo GmbH, Landsberger Straße 284, 80687 Munich, Germany) and its subcontractors. In addition to Oracle Life Sciences, the following companies are also processors of your data:

- Verian (company name: Mantle Germany GmbH), Landsberger Str. 284, 80687 Munich, Germany: this company is involved in liaison with the residents' registration offices and receives your contact details from them, so that we can send you an invitation letter. Furthermore, Verian digitally manages your pseudonymised interview and test data (called survey data). Verian is also the recipient of the completed paper questionnaires that you send by post. Verian provides some of the field staff (for example, contact persons or interviewers) as well.
- Infratrend Forschung GmbH, Aubinger Str. 105a, 81243 Munich,

Germany, prepares, prints, and sends the invitation letters and the sampling parcel to you. It requires your address to do this. This company also hires most of the field staff. This includes the contact persons, the interviewers, and the medical professionals. Infratrend Forschung GmbH will therefore need your contact details for the two visits to your home. The interviewers and the medical professionals who visit you at home collect your pseudonymised survey data. For quality assurance purposes, Infratrend accompanies the field staff to your home in individual cases.

- Telquest GmbH: this company manages the telephone hotline and e-mail address, which have been set up specifically to answer your questions and to make appointments, and receives your reply card for making appointments by post. As part of making an appointment, Telquest GmbH processes your contact details. Telquest GmbH also assists Verian in liaising with the residents' registration offices, and therefore has access to your contact details, which are provided by the residents' registration offices.
- RB Profi-Kontor GmbH, Einhausstrasse 1, 56459 Langenhahn, Germany: this company digitises your paper questionnaires and then destroys them. The paper questionnaires contain your survey data, but no contact details, only the participant number.

To visualise this, please see figure 2 of the insert to the survey information.

After the survey has been completed and analysed and its findings reported to the German Environment Agency, Oracle Life Sciences will delete your personal data at the end of the contract (October 2025 at the latest), and will also ensure that its contract data processors have deleted all personal and survey data of GerES VI participants after the end of the contract between Oracle Life Sciences and the German Environment Agency. The signed consent forms, from which names and participant numbers have been removed or deleted, will be handed over to the German Environment Agency and stored there for 10 years, in order to be able to prove that each participant consented to take part in the survey, even after the survey has ended.

Only your participant number is stated on the questionnaires, the measurement logs and sample containers. The laboratories that carry out the pollutant analyses are only aware of this participant number.

We keep your address data and the geo-coordinates of your residential address in a specially protected place, separate from the questionnaire and analysis data. We only combine your address data with the analysis data once, to enable us to send you your pollutant metrics.

After completion of the survey, we will also irrevocably delete your address data and only keep your survey data under the participant number.

We permanently store the geo-coordinates of your residential address in a specially protected manner to enable us, at a later date,

to link general environmental data with data specific to where you live. After we have deleted your address data, it is no longer possible to delete your survey data or destroy your samples.

Your address data will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent.

How is your data analysed?

All survey data collected as part of GerES VI is only stored and analysed in encrypted form. The scientific staff who carry out the analyses usually only know the participant numbers. During data collection (field time) and subsequent data checking, there will be exceptions (individual persons) who have access to both personal and survey data. This applies in particular to staff who visit you at home to take fine dust measurements and perform mould detection inspections using sniffer dogs, (if you have been selected for this purpose), and who draft your notification of findings. In total, there are 8 people at the German Environment Agency who have access to both your survey data and your address data. This is necessary to ensure that the data is always accessible, even in the event of staff absences. The analysis tables combine the data of so many people, meaning no one can be identified.

By participating, you are providing valuable data about your health. Analysing this data together with pollutant metrics enables us to investigate correlations between environmental pollution and health complaints.

The German Environment Agency conducts all analyses itself or collaborates with public research institutions. For this purpose, the German Environment Agency makes participants' survey data available to its collaborative partners and the wider scientific community in the form of data pools. These do not contain any information that allows conclusions to be drawn about individuals.

What further use will be made of your survey data and samples?

Not all pollutant measurements can be taken during the survey period (2023-2024), due to the high administrative effort involved. Some measurements of certain pollutants (e.g., certain UV filters or cleaning agents) are only possible at a later stage. For this reason, portions of your morning urine sample will be stored in encrypted form at the German Environment Agency until these substances are measured. The interim storage of your morning urine sample is estimated to cover a period of 2-5 years after sampling. Unfortunately, an environmental medical assessment for these subsequent pollutant analyses is not possible, as your contact data will be deleted after completion of the fieldwork, and consequently can no longer be matched to you as a person.

You can specify further uses of your samples and data in the consent form that you sign before the blood sample is taken.

You can leave your samples with the German Environment Agency on a permanent basis, so that they can be analysed in terms of further issues at the German Environment Agency or by German and international collaborative partners. You will not receive any notification of your individual results from these future research projects either.

You can consent to the German Environment Agency sharing your survey data with German and international partners and governmental organisations for further analysis and policy advice. You can also consent to the storage of your survey data in comprehensive databases. In all disclosures, we take care to ensure that no inference can be made about individuals. However, a small residual risk of identification due to the volume of data cannot be completely ruled out in extreme cases.

We review each proposal in detail before we make any further use of your samples and associated survey data for research and policy advice purposes.

Commercial use of data and samples or disclosure to health and other insurers is categorically ruled out.

What rights do you have?

I have the following data protection rights in accordance with Art. 7, 15 - 21 and 77 para. 1 GDPR:

- The right to request information about what personal data of mine has been stored (Art. 15) and to correct and/or complete it, if it is inaccurate (Art. 16). The right to deletion (Art. 17). This is only possible, however, if my personal data is no longer required, is processed unlawfully or if the relevant consent has been withdrawn. The right to have processing of my data restricted (Art. 18) and the right to receive the data I have provided in a structured, standard, machine-readable format (Art. 20).

I can assert these rights for as long as the data can be matched to me as a person.

- The right to withdraw my consent at any time without giving reasons and to terminate my participation in the survey prematurely without me being disadvantaged in any way (Art. 7).
- The right to object to further processing of my personal data in special situations, where this is justified by the performance of public functions or the safeguarding of public and private interests. In accordance with § 36 BDSG (Federal Data Protection Act), this right does not apply if a public body is legally obliged to process the data (Art. 21).
- The right to complain to the Data Protection Officer of the German Environment Agency [Mr. Langhoff, Bismarckplatz 1, 14193 Berlin, Tel: +49 (0)30 8903 5141] or to the supervisory authority [The Federal Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information (BfDI), Husarenstr. 30, 53117 Bonn, +49 (0) 228-997799-0] (Art. 77).

Furthermore, I have

- The right to demand the destruction of my samples at any time without giving reasons, and without me being disadvantaged in any way.

I can assert this right for as long as the samples can be matched to me as a person. This means that it will no longer be possible to destroy your samples after we have deleted your address data.

If you still have any questions,

we are happy to assist you by phone or e-mail.

For feedback or questions concerning your appointment:

Phone: 0800 1121 139 (free of charge for you)

E-mail: GerES@telquest.de

For questions concerning the study itself:

Phone: 030 8903 1650

(Mon-Wed 9 am - 12 noon and Thu 12 noon - 3 pm)

E-mail: GerES@uba.de

Internet: http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/GerESVI_en

Thank you for your willingness to participate in GerES VI!



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PO Box 14 06

06813 Dessau-Roßlau

Phone: +49 30 8903-1650 (GerES team)

Phone: +49 340 2103-0 (UBA central office)

Internet: www.umweltbundesamt.de

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