

## Google's response to EPIC & PPR's joint letter

11/17/08

Flu Trends uses aggregated data from hundreds of millions of searches over time. Flu Trends uses aggregations of search query data which contain no information that can identify users personally. We also never reveal how many users are searching for particular queries. The only information released publicly or to the CDC is what is seen on the Flu Trends website now: estimates of the percentages of people with influenza-like illnesses.

(The aggregate data come from our standard search logs, and we anonymize IP addresses after 9 months and cookies after 18 months. Read more about our search logs practices in a blog post: <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2008/09/another-step-to-protect-user-privacy.html> about our anonymization policies.)

We've published a page on the Flu Trends web site about how Flu Trends works (<http://www.google.org/about/flutrends/how.html>). On this page, we explain the methodology behind the engineering team's research and provide a link to an early version of their research manuscript (<http://www.google.org/about/flutrends/manuscript.pdf>). A later version has been accepted in principle for publication in *Nature*. You can also check out the Flu Trends FAQ (<http://www.google.org/about/flutrends/faq.html>) or the blog post (<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2008/11/how-we-help-track-flu-trends.html>) that we published explaining more about how Flu Trends uses aggregate search data to provide flu estimates.

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