



**By email**

[request-685031-5f49910d@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-685031-5f49910d@whatdotheyknow.com)

Our ref: 17/08/hf/1031

22 September 2020

Dear Martin Murray,

**Re: The effectiveness of masks in reducing the spread of a virus.**

Thank you for your email dated 17 August 2020. In accordance with Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act), I can confirm that Public Health England (PHE) does hold the information you have specified.

**Request**

***please supply any and all copies of studies, information and communications (including internal & external email or written communication) pertaining to the effectiveness or otherwise of face masks in reducing (or increasing) virus and bacterial infection rates within the public domain. Please also provide the same information and communications (including internal & external email or written communication) pertaining to the use of face masks within a medical setting.***

**Response**

Our rapid review on face coverings is published here:

<https://phelibrary.koha-ptfs.co.uk/covid19rapidreviews/>

PHE searched for evidence published between 25 March and 5 June, as prior to this, a large systematic review had already been undertaken. PHE identified 27 new studies (15 preprints) examining the effectiveness of face coverings in non-healthcare settings and the efficacy of different types of face coverings. The evidence was considered weak due to the study designs and publication status.

Evidence from epidemiological and modelling studies suggested that the use of face coverings in the community may contribute to reducing the spread of COVID-19 and that early intervention may result in a lower peak infection rate. Evidence from modelling studies suggests that beneficial effects of wearing masks may be increased when combined with other non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as hand washing and social distancing; and limited and weak evidence from laboratory studies suggests that materials such as cotton and polyester might block droplets with a filtering efficiency similar to medical masks when folded in 2 or 3 layers.

Any additional information you have requested, such as correspondence, is too broad in scope. Our initial searches indicate that to determine whether we hold the information, retrieve and extract information to respond to your request as it stands would exceed the cost threshold of £600. The cost is calculated at a staff rate time of £25 per person per hour working for 24 hours to respond to the request. Therefore, this information is exempt in accordance with the Section 12 – *cost of compliance* exemption as compliance with the request would exceed the appropriate limit - of the Act.

If you have any queries regarding the information that has been supplied to you, please refer your query to in writing in the first instance. If you remain dissatisfied and would like to request an internal review, then please contact us at the address above or by emailing [foi@phe.gov.uk](mailto:foi@phe.gov.uk).

Please note that you have the right to an independent review by the Information Commissioner's Office if a complaint cannot be resolved through the PHE complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner's Office can be contacted by writing to Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,  
FOI Team