



Public Health England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

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By email
request-707612-a931e2d8@whatdotheyknow.com

Our ref: 20/11/k/1967

14 December 2020

Dear Stuart Hopkins,

Re: Freedom of Information request - PCR Test Cycle Threshold

Thank you for your email dated 20 November 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 not hold the information you have specified.

Your Request

With a recent court ruling in Portugal regarding the ruling that PCR tests are Unreliable.

It was noted that several countries are using a higher than normal Cycle Threshold near and very close to 40, which have shown to have an accuracy of 3% with a false positive rate of 97%

Having reviewed other FOI's in relation to requesting the information relating to the Cycle threshold used here in the UK it seems there has not actually been an answer to this question.

I have reviewed this document

https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fuploads%2Fsystem%2Fuploads%2Fattachment_data%2Ffile%2F926410%2FUnderstanding_Cycle_Threshold_Ct_in_SARS-CoV-2_RT-PCR_.pdf&data=04%7C01%7CFOI%40phe.gov.uk%7C6fd6ce37d2cc4ffbb5bd08d88d4a6fa9%7Cee4e14994a354b2ead475f3cf9de8666%7C0%7C1%7C637414698782443810%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJB Til6lk1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C2000&sdata=ZIC4mQ7Luo4y%2FyD0IQHToKLUvFTu8Ssv5HR2sjGSxI%3D&reserved=0

It does not state what Cycle threshold is being used here in the UK when testing for Covid.

Please clearly indicate the Cycle threshold being used in the UK as a number.

Response

PHE can confirm that it does not hold the information as specified in your request.

There are multiple tests being used and every kit will have its own interpretative criteria and thresholds, as recommended by the manufacturer. There are at least 80 different platforms in use, configured in various ways in different laboratories. Range, mean, median for thresholds will be dependent on the operating arrangements in each laboratory and relate to each kit/assay being used. These laboratories have a statutory duty to report positive cases to PHE, but they are not obliged to advise PHE which tests they are using, nor submit CT values used to PHE.

Under section 16, a public authority has a duty to provide advice and assistance. As such, you may wish to contact the manufacturers of the tests for further information on the recommended cycle thresholds for their products. Additionally, you may wish to contact the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), which oversees the government testing programme. DHSC can be contacted at:

freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk.

Furthermore, you may wish to contact the Medicines and Health products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). PCR tests have been validated before placing into widespread use, and this would involve specificity testing. This involves testing against other related and non-related viruses for their positivity. These validation results are reviewed by MHRA before allowing products onto the market.

If you have any queries regarding the information that has been supplied to you, please refer your query to us 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.

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