



# Department of Health & Social Care

Freedom of Information Team  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
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[www.gov.uk/dhsc](http://www.gov.uk/dhsc)

Mr Christopher Whitmey  
request-712280-  
6986300e@whatdotheyknow.com

6 January 2021

Dear Mr Whitmey,

## **Freedom of Information Request Reference FOI-1281591**

Thank you for your request dated 13 December 2020 in which you asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC):

***“The Daily Mail Online published “What they DON’T tell you about COVID” on 20 November 2020. Please may I have details and/or copies of all communications concerning the article between the Department, or any other part of the government, and the publishers and/or any other parties?”***

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

DHSC holds the information you requested. We have interpreted the scope of the FOI request to mean emails between the Press Office, Cabinet Office, Special Advisors (SpAds) and the Daily Mail, as there were no meetings about the response. It should be noted that we have redacted some of this information under Section 40(2) of the FOIA.

Section 40(2) provides for the protection of personal information. Section 40 prohibits a public body from disclosing personally identifiable information, as doing so would contravene data protection principles.

Please see the attached PDF documents which are labelled as follows:

CO Email 1/2/3 - DHSC and Cabinet Office discussion on rebuttal tweet and cross-government line

DHSC Email 1 – Clearance from SIO of media line

DHSC Email 2 – Clearance from G7 of media line

DHSC Email 3 – Clearance from SpAds of media line

DHSC Email 4 – Email from the Director of Communications following clearance

DHSC Tweet Email 1 – Press Office / Social Media discussion on tweet

## DHSC Tweet Email 2 – Clearance from SpAds of tweet

### Government Response to Mail Online Piece

Outside of the scope of the FOI Act, and on a discretionary basis, you may be interested in the following information. The Mail article is incorrect for the following reasons:

- The article published a chart claiming the number of weekly deaths were “barely any higher” than the maximum level from the previous five years - this is incorrect.
- The Mail’s chart claims in the 44th week of 2020, 10,887 people died, while the maximum number of deaths in the 44th week of the previous five years was 10,861 - 26 lower.
- The first figure is correct, the second figure is wrong. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, which the Mail said is one of the original data sources for the chart, show the highest number of deaths in week 44 between 2015 and 2019 was actually 10,164 in 2019, that’s 723 lower.
- The reason for this difference is the Mail’s chart claims to be “adjusted for population growth”. However, this adjustment does not relate to any credible figure for actual population growth.

More details are set out here: <https://fullfact.org/health/mail-deaths-chart/>

If you are not satisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to appeal by asking for an internal review. This should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter and sent to [FreedomOfInformation@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:FreedomOfInformation@dhsc.gov.uk), or to the address at the top of this letter.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communication.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may complain directly to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have already appealed our original response and received our internal review decision. You should raise your concerns with the ICO within three months of your last meaningful contact with us.

The ICO can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF

<https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>

Yours sincerely,

Hazel Percy

Freedom of Information Officer  
E: [freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk)