



# Department of Health & Social Care

Freedom of Information Team  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

[www.gov.uk/dhsc](http://www.gov.uk/dhsc)

Mr Mark Oakford  
[request-708513-  
beff8fcf@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-708513-beff8fcf@whatdotheyknow.com)

22 December 2020

Dear Mr Oakford,

## **Freedom of Information Request Reference FOI-1276010**

Thank you for your request dated 24 November 2020 in which you asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC):

***Subject: Freedom of Information request - Details of emails detailing the downgrading of Covid 19 from HCID to NOID***

***I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request the following information.***

***On the 19th of March 2020 the Covid 19 pandemic was publicly announced as being officially downgraded from a High Consequence Infectious Disease (HCID) to a Notifiable Infectious Disease (NOID). The Bill was subsequently passed on the 26th March 2020. It is my understanding that the reclassification emails between DHSC and the Secretary of State Matt Hancock commenced on the 13th March 2020. The draconian and dystopian effects upon our society as a result of this decision are catastrophic. I am requesting that these emails be made public hence this request. I cannot foresee any reason to withhold this information with your vast array of exemptions as it is a decision which has been made that affects every member of society. I would consider this information to be of huge public interest seeing as it is controlling their very existence. These emails whilst being private in respect of Mr Hancock talking to a Government Department should not be classed as secret or classified. Should that be the case then one would extract from that there is information in them that is contrary to what has been published.***

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

I have considered your request for information, but I am unable to answer it without further clarification. Section 1(3) of the FOIA does not oblige us to answer requests where we require further clarification to identify and locate the information requested.

Your request refers to 'reclassification emails between DHSC and the Secretary of State', and to emails having been security classified as 'secret.'

So that I can provide you with the right information, I would be grateful if you could be more specific about the information you are seeking, as 'reclassification emails' could be interpreted to include any materials sent to the Secretary of State, or his office, that reference the advice of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) regarding the classification of COVID-19, or which rely on that classification in their content. Specifically, might you be referring to the notification on 13 March from the ACDP to DHSC (not specifically to the Secretary of State) as regards the classification of COVID-19?

If you are able to clarify this to us, then we may be able to continue to process your request. However, please be aware that we cannot guarantee at this stage that a clarified request will fall within the FOIA cost limit, or that other exemptions will not apply.

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,

Dorothy Crowe

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