



# Public Health England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Public Accountability Unit  
Wellington House  
133-155 Waterloo Road  
London SE1 8UG

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

## By email

[request-744440-6b12cc34@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-744440-6b12cc34@whatdotheyknow.com)

Our ref: 06/04/kl/034

5 May 2021

Dear Anthony Matfield,

## **Re: Freedom of Information request - Effectiveness of face coverings on school children, with respect to transmission of covid**

Thank you for your request received on 6 April 2021 addressed to Public Health England (PHE). In accordance with Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act), I can confirm that PHE does hold the information you have specified.

### **Request**

***Please can you provide me with the scientific evidence used to produce the guidance to the DFE, that has recommended that all school children in secondary schools wear face coverings in classes.***

### **Response**

PHE can confirm that it does hold information on the data and evidence provided by PHE to support the Department of Education (DfE) review of their policy on the use of face coverings in secondary school classrooms. However, the information is exempt under section 21 of the Act because it is reasonably accessible by other means, and the terms of the exemption mean that we do not have to consider whether or not it would be in the public interest for you to have the information. For your convenience, we have collated the following information.

- The R value and growth rate
  - The latest reproduction number (R) and growth rate of Coronavirus (COVID-19) (data as of 26 March) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-r-value-and-growth-rate#:~:text=The%20R%20range%20for%20England,as%20of%2026%20March%202021.>
- Population prevalence data, by age group
  - Data from the Office of National Statistics Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey, UK: 26 March (data available for the week ending 20<sup>th</sup> of

March)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19infectionssurveypilot/26march2021>

- Data from Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 testing
  - PHE Weekly Influenza and COVID-19 Surveillance graphs (data from week 11, between 15 and 21 March 2021)  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/973176/Weekly\\_COVID-19\\_and\\_Influenza\\_Surveillance\\_Graphs\\_W12.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973176/Weekly_COVID-19_and_Influenza_Surveillance_Graphs_W12.pdf) (particularly Slides 19 - 31)
- Data on outbreaks in schools
  - PHE Weekly Influenza and COVID-19 Surveillance graphs (data from week 11, between 15 and 21 March 2021), see Slides 14-16  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/973176/Weekly\\_COVID-19\\_and\\_Influenza\\_Surveillance\\_Graphs\\_W12.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973176/Weekly_COVID-19_and_Influenza_Surveillance_Graphs_W12.pdf) (particularly Slides 13 – 17)
- Published literature and other evidence
  - COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey Round 2, England: December 2020  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/covid19schoolsinfectionssurveyround2e ngland/december2020>
  - McMaster Living Rapid Evidence Review Update 14: What is the specific role of daycares and schools in COVID-19 transmission? <https://www.nccmt.ca/covid-19/covid-19-rapid-evidence-service/19>

PHE is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and a distinct organisation with operational autonomy. PHE provide government, local government, the NHS, Parliament, industry and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific expertise and support. PHE does not set policy or legislation. Although PHE does provide scientific evidence support to the central government in the response to COVID-19, PHE is one of many departments, organisations and academic partners providing scientific advice to the central government.

Under section 16, a public authority has a duty to provide advice and assistance. Accordingly, you may wish to contact the DfE for further information on what scientific evidence was considered in the policy review on the use of face coverings in secondary school classrooms.

If you have any queries regarding the information that has been supplied to you, please refer your query to me 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 calling the ICO's helpline on 0303 123 1113, visiting the ICO's website at [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk) or writing to the ICO at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely  
FOI Team