

Colin Davies  
Via: request-703307-6a969a6f@whatdotheyknow.com

Our ref: IR2021/00320

4 March 2021

Dear Colin Davies

Cabinet Office Internal Review Reference: IR2021/00320  
(Original Case Reference: FOI2020/16830)

#### REVIEW OF REQUEST UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

Thank you for your email of 7th January 2021. You asked for an internal review of our response to your request for information of 24th November 2020. In your request you asked for information about the evidence for use of face masks.

I have carefully reviewed the handling of your request and established that section 21 was properly applied. Section 21 exempts information if this information is reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption and the Cabinet Office is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. This information is available on the links given in the original response and below.

In addition to the online evidence Cabinet Office provided in the original response to your question about risk assessments undertaken for face mask usage, I also consider that there is more detailed information available in the public domain to answer your question on evidence for the use of face masks. I have therefore concluded that I should revise the decision given in our letter in order to provide you with additional links to this further information.

There are a number of papers that discuss the wearing of face coverings in depth. Bodies such as Environmental Modelling Group (EMG), the Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B), the Transmission Group (TWEG) and the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) have published evidence on the role of face coverings in the fight against COVID:

[EMG/SPI-B/TWEG: Mitigations to reduce transmission of the new variant](#)

(22nd Dec 2020, this is the latest paper in light of new variants)

[NERVTAG/EMG: Duration of wearing of face coverings](#)

(15th Dec 2020)

[NERVTAG/EMG: Role of aerosol transmission in COVID-19](#)

(22nd Jul 2020)

GO Science gives scientific advice to the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet, they ensure the quality and use of scientific evidence and advice in government and provide the best scientific advice in the case of emergencies, through SAGE.

The New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) advises the government on the threat posed by new and emerging respiratory viruses. NERVTAG is an expert committee of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), which advises the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and, through the CMO, ministers, DHSC and other government departments.

It provides scientific risk assessment and mitigation advice on the threat posed by new and emerging respiratory viruses and on options for their management.

Should you require any further information, GO Science and DHSC are best placed to answer. I have provided weblinks to their contact details below:

[Contact GO Science](#)

[Contact DHSC](#)

If you are unhappy with the handling of your request for information you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire

SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely

Rachel Anderson

Head of Freedom of Information

Cabinet Office