



Ref. FOI/20210604/6

30 June 2021

Reply to request for information under the Freedom of Information Act	
Your ref	Email of 4 June 2021
Request	<p>I am requesting any documents stored on your computer network or emails relating to the evolution of SARS-CoV-2 causing COVID-19 .</p> <p>Indian scientists found 4 insertions in the spike glycoprotein (S) which are unique to the 2019-nCoV and are not present in other coronaviruses. Importantly, amino acid residues in all the 4 inserts have identity or similarity to those in the HIV-1 gp120 or HIV-1 Gag.</p> <p>Please provide me with any documents, including emails stored at Oxford University which contain any of these 3 key words since January 2020</p> <p>HIV HIV-1 gp120 HIV-1 Gag</p>

Dear Mr Miller

I write in reply to your email of 4 June, requesting the above information.

We will not comply with your request in its current form, as we estimate that the time required to retrieve and extract it would exceed the maximum amount of time a public authority is required to spend on a single request, namely, 18 hours. The University's central IT department has identified over 1.5 million emails that contain one or more of the words specified in your request. Downloading this number of items would be a complex and time-consuming process, which would take well in excess of 18 hours. We are therefore refusing your request under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Section 12 allows a public authority to refuse a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of complying with it would exceed the 'appropriate limit' prescribed in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 (the 'Regulations'). The appropriate limit for universities is £450, which, because the Regulations fix staff costs at £25 an hour, corresponds to a time limit of 18 hours or just over two working days.

We are also entitled to refuse your request under section 14(1) of the FOIA. The Information Tribunal has accepted that a public authority may use section 14(1) to refuse a request that would impose a disproportionate burden, after allowing for activities that cannot be taken into account under section 12 e.g. the time required to redact any exempt information or to consult with third parties. It would be necessary to redact from each email any information that constitutes the personal data, where the disclosure of that information would breach data protection principles. To examine and redact 1.5 million mails would place an undue burden on the University and represent a significant distraction from its core functions.



The University is mindful of its obligation under section 16 of the FOIA to provide advice and assistance. In this instance, we suggest that you consider formulating a request that it is focussed on a particular area of research and/or a particular research group. We suggest you search for HIV research groups on the website of the Medical Sciences Division: <https://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/research/research-in-our-departments>.

INTERNAL REVIEW

You may request an internal review of this response by e-mailing foi@admin.ox.ac.uk. A request for internal review should be submitted no later than 40 working days from the date of this letter.

THE INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

If, after the internal review, you are still dissatisfied, you have the right under FOIA to apply to the Information Commissioner for a decision as to whether your request has been dealt with in accordance with the FOIA. You can do this online using the [Information Commissioner's complaints portal](#).

Yours sincerely

Information Compliance Team