



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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[DWP Website](https://www.dwp.gov.uk)

Our Ref: FOI2021/14751

04 March 2021

Dear Ian Stirling,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 20 February. You wrote:

“Can you inform me about what the process is if any for the DWP collecting information on a new disorder?

For example, long covid has by the ONS been estimated to result in some symptoms 12 weeks out in 10% of the infected, or 20% of those symptomatic.

Has any data been collected for the purposes of seeing if regulations or guidance should be altered, if so what?

Has any data on estimated prevalences of long covid going forward as a disabling condition qualifying people for PIP/UC (LCW/LCWRA).

Please note, I am not asking for copies of internal discussions of this evidence, unless any guidance has been issued to decisionmakers.”

DWP Response

It may be helpful if we explain the role of the Fol Act. It provides a legal right of access to recorded information held by a public authority like the DWP, subject to certain exemptions that may apply. The Act does not oblige a public authority to create new information to answer questions; nor does it require a public authority to give advice, opinion or explanation, generate answers to questions, or create or obtain information it does not hold.

If you ask a question, rather than requesting recorded information, we will provide you with the recorded information that best answers the question. Once we have provided the recorded information, we have met our obligations under the Act; interpreting the information provided is up to you.

We do not hold any recorded information to answer your request. However, you may find the following explanation useful. We have provided this outside our obligations under the Fol Act.

Neither the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment nor the Work Capability Assessment, which assesses whether or not a claimant for Universal Credit (UC) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) has limited capability for work, are condition-based assessments. They are both functional assessments that assess the impact that a person's disability or health condition has, rather than the condition itself. This means that

any health condition, for example a completely new health condition or a condition so rare that it doesn't have a name, can be assessed and, if they meet the appropriate assessment criteria, an award for PIP/the relevant element of UC or component of ESA can be made, as appropriate.

The Department is keeping COVID-related disabilities under close review, and are working closely with Assessment Providers to develop appropriate training and guidance on long COVID.

DWP uses data to inform and evaluate policy decisions on an on-going basis.

Work is underway to introduce appropriate codes for COVID into the clinical coding system for all relevant benefits. Information on PIP or UC claims with Long COVID as a primary disabling condition is not currently available to Departmental analysts. To obtain this information would require a manual search of all applications and individual case notes.

The codes and descriptions to identify the various COVID conditions have only recently been agreed by the [World Health Organisation](#) and the department has not yet implemented the necessary changes required to automatically capture this information across the various systems used to administer disability related benefits.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team
Department for Work and Pensions

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-request@dw.gov.uk or by writing to: DWP Central Fol Team, Caxton House, 6-12 Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA.

Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Website: [ICO Contact Information](#) or telephone 0303 123 1113.