



Public Health  
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

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

T 020 8327 6920

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

By email

[request-717880-02927b48@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-717880-02927b48@whatdotheyknow.com)

Our ref: 12/01/nk/2430

09 February 2021

Dear B Jones

**Re: Mask / face covering - what is the 'best available evidence' and what is the NHS Covid-19 treatment protocol**

Thank you for your request received on 12 January 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 partly holds the information you have specified.

***Request***

***"The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering may reduce the spread of coronavirus droplets in certain circumstances, helping to protect others."***

***I would like to know:***

***1a) What the "best available" scientific evidence is as of Jan 2021?***

***1b) Who decided that this piece of evidence is the "best available" and why?***

I can confirm that PHE does hold the information specified. PHE has carried out a rapid evidence review on face coverings.

The rapid review 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. However, for your convenience I have provided the link below to the updated review as of 29 January 2021:

<https://phe.koha-ptfs.co.uk/cgi-bin/koha/opac-retrieve-file.pl?id=d86880bf65bd6b18eae21aa3bdaf2a4b>

***Regarding treatment of Covid-19 patients in hospital:***

***2) What is the standard or generally standard treatment protocol for Covid-19 patients who are hospitalised?***

I can confirm that PHE partly holds the information specified. However 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. However, for your convenience I have provided the link below to the Guidance for maintaining services within health and care settings.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/954690/Infection Prevention and Control Guidance January 2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/954690/Infection_Prevention_and_Control_Guidance_January_2021.pdf)

Under Section 16 of the FOI Act, public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance. Accordingly, you may wish to contact the National Health Service (NHS) who may be able to provide further information around hospital protocol.

***Regarding Covid "case" diagnosis:***

***3a) What is the cycle threshold (CT) used in the PCR 'tests' by the NHS?***

***3b) Has the CT used always been the same? If not, what changes have been made and when?***

PHE can confirm it holds this information for PHE laboratories. However, to retrieve and extract the information to respond to your request as it stands would exceed the cost limit of £600. The cost limit is calculated at a staff rate time at £25 per person per hour working for 24 hours to respond to the request. Therefore, this information is exempt in accordance with Section 12 of the Act.

The Cycle Threshold varies between the various platforms used within each testing laboratory, and is not therefore uniform. There is correlation between some Platform types, where all parts of the process are similar. Every PHE laboratory has determined the limit of detection for SARS-CoV-2 across all assays used for patient testing. Additionally, every PHE laboratory has in place a strategy for the confirmation of positive results when the screening result was above the threshold identified in the screening assays.

PHE does not hold this information for non-PHE laboratories. Many laboratories contribute to the government's testing programme and PHE does not maintain central records of testing undertaken in each lab.

Under Section 16 of the FOI Act, public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance. Accordingly, you may wish to contact the National Health Service (NHS)

You may also find the publication on 'understanding cycle threshold (Ct) in SARS-CoV-2 RT-PCR' useful;

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/926410/Understanding Cycle Threshold Ct in SARS-CoV-2 RT-PCR .pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/926410/Understanding_Cycle_Threshold_Ct_in_SARS-CoV-2_RT-PCR_.pdf)

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