

Health Protection Branch  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
BELFAST  
BT4 3SQ

Joanne Clifford  
[request-686330-0fc8f46b@whatdotheyknow.com](#)

29 October 2020

Dear Ms Clifford

**Request for Information: Freedom of Information Act 2000**  
**Reference Number: DOH/2020-0166**

I firstly wish to apologise for the delay in answering your request for information submitted on 20 August 2020. The Department is aware that we are outside the legislative time to respond to your request.

As you will understand resources within the Department and wider health organisations throughout NI, have been stretched over the last number of months due to ongoing and ever changing Covid19 challenges. A considerable number of staff have been redeployed from their normal “day jobs” to work solely on response to the current pandemic.

The Department acknowledges public interest in the transparency and accountability of government, and the immeasurable public interest associated with the current pandemic and how that affects us all. We fully recognise that disclosure of the information you have requested will give citizens, like yourself, confidence that decisions are taken on the basis of the best available information.

However the staff who are in the best position to answer your query fully are the very staff engaged in the daily discussions and consultations with the Minister and the Executive in considering the most appropriate course of action to steer us through the current crisis.

In the meantime and in an effort to be as helpful as possible, a lot of information underpinning decisions taken by the Department and Health Minister, is derived from work undertaken by other organisations such as the *Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)*, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and Public Health Agency (PHA). As well as this information, the Department this week has begun publishing some of the scientific evidence on the wearing of face masks on its website. The website is updated regularly with general advice on Covid19 as well as the Department's dashboard with specific Covid19 data which is updated daily. This information can be found at the following links:

[SAGE](#), [NISRA](#), [PHA](#), the [Department's own website](#) and the [Department's dashboard with specific Covid19 data](#), [Scientific data](#) and [R number data](#).

Additionally Minister provides regular updates to MLA's during plenary sessions and Minister & Departmental officials regularly attend NI Assembly Committee evidence sessions. Recordings and transcripts of these can be viewed on the NI Assembly website.

I realise that this perhaps does not answer your specific questions but I hope you may get the answers you seek via the published information.

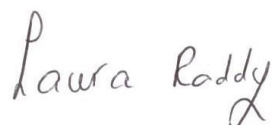
We again apologise for the delay in providing a response but hope you understand the current circumstances and the resource limitations the Department is currently experiencing.

If you feel that the information we have provided does not fully meet your request please contact us at 02890528689 in the first instance. You have the right to request a formal review by the Department within two calendar months of the date of this letter. If you wish to do so, please write to Mr Brendan O'Neill ([foi@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:foi@health-ni.gov.uk)), Annexe 3, Castle Buildings, Stormont, Belfast BT4 3SQ.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Laura Ruddy'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'L' and a stylized 'R'.

**Laura Roddy**  
**Local Information Manager**