



By email

request-710144-d54f6721@whatdotheyknow.com

Our ref: 23/12/ld/2231

21 January 2021

Dear Jane Westover,

Re: Internal review of Case ref: No. 2041 – Explanation of supposed under declaring of COVID-19 cases by PHE compared to the media

I refer to your email of 23 December 2020 requesting an internal review of the handling of case reference 2041, in relation to your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) "the Act.

Your Request case ref: 2041

Public Health England (PHE) received your information request on the 1 December 2020. Under the FOI Act PHE had until the 31 December 2020 to respond to your request.

Response Case ref: 2041

PHE sent you its response on the 23 December 2020 and, correctly, confirmed it did not hold the information you requested. PHE also provided you with advice and assistance under section 16 of the FOI Act by including the following link to its dashboard, which holds data on the total number of COVID-19 cases in the UK:

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases>

Internal review decision

PHE has now conducted the internal review and concludes that PHE correctly confirmed it did not hold the information you requested within the statutory deadline.

However, PHE could have informed you that COVID-19 is a Notifiable Disease under the Health Protection (Notification) Regulations 2010, and as per the regulations, notifications of positive COVID-19 cases are primarily through reporting to PHE's

laboratory surveillance system, the Second-Generation Surveillance System (SGSS). These two methods of reporting operate independently. More information on the methods of reporting positive cases can be found at the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/notifiable-diseases-and-causative-organisms-how-to-report>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/926838/PHE_Laboratory_reporting_guidelines_October-2020-v3.pdf

Notifications received outside the SGSS mechanism, for example a suspected case by a general practitioner, are listed in the Weekly NOIDS Reports. NOIDS reports are one of multiple routes through which clinicians report suspected cases of COVID-19, which may or may not be subsequently confirmed. These are based on clinical suspicion alone and as such a proportion of these are likely not to be the suspected infection. NOIDS reports do not represent the total number of confirmed cases.

The daily number of laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases, as declared by PHE and by the Government, can be found on the dashboard as outlined above. Please note, cases are the number of people with at least one positive COVID-19 virus test result. COVID-19 cases are identified by taking specimens from people and testing them for the presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. If the test is positive, this is referred to as a case. If a person has had more than one positive test they are only counted as one case.

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 or writing to the ICO at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely

FOI Manager