



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

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By email

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Our ref: 18/02/ay/2838

10 March 2021

Dear Chris Dodd,

Re: 2838 - FOI Cycle threshold to run PCR Test before 20th July 2021

Thank you for your request received on 18 February 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 does partly hold the information you have specified.

Request

At what cycle threshold was recommended to run a pcr test before the 20th of july 2021

Response

PHE can confirm it does hold the information requested in relation to PCR tests used within PHE laboratories. PHE has also assumed that your request was in relation to cycle threshold before 20 July 2020 rather than 2021 as per your request.

Cycle threshold (Ct) is a semi-quantitative value that can broadly categorise the concentration of viral genetic material in a patient sample following testing by RT PCR as low, medium or high. It tells us approximately how much viral genetic material is in the sample.

There over 80 different commercial PCR tests and several platforms used in the UK. Each comes with its own standardised interpretation. Some may provide Ct values some may not. Therefore, Ct values cannot be directly compared between assays of different types. All labs are asked to perform preliminary checks on the limits of detection and create a standard operating procedure based on guidance above to interpret a positive or negative result.

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

The Medicines and Health Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is the national regulator for medical tests and any test can legally be marketed and deployed in the UK once it receives a CE mark. For further information refer to this link here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-tests-and-testing-kits-for-coronavirus-covid-19-work/process-for-developing-and-evaluating-novel-molecular-assays-for-covid-19>

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.

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 Team