



By email

request-710924-a9ebd1e1@whatdotheyknow.com

Our ref: 04/12/nk/2079

06 January 2021

Dear P Newton

Re: Freedom of Information request - Public Health Interest

Thank you for your request received on 04 December 2020 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. I will answer your request in the order raised

Request

- 1) Please disclose any recorded information proving that a SARS-CoV-2 virus exists in Nature.***
- 2) Please disclose any recorded information proving that a COVID-19 disease exists in Nature and is proven to be caused by a SARS-CoV-2 virus.***

PHE can confirm it does not hold the information requested for questions 1 and 2.

Under Section 16 of the FOI Act, public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance. You may find the below publication useful;

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32766998/>

- 3) Please disclose any recorded information that the Pfizer vaccine said to mitigate symptoms of a COVID-19 disease is proven safe and effective against a SARS-CoV-2 virus, or in simple terms, is proven to provide immunity against a purported SARS-CoV-2 viral infection.***

PHE can confirm it does not hold the information you have requested.

Under Section 16 of the FOI Act, public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance. Accordingly, you may wish to contact the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, as they may be able to advise you further.

The contact details can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/medicines-and-healthcare-products-regulatory-agency>.

Alternatively, you may wish to contact the vaccine manufacturer directly.

4) Please disclose any recorded information demonstrating the evidence that a SARS-CoV-2 virus is capable of transmission causing COVID-19. Note: this requires evidence that an identifiable SARS-CoV-2 virus [nucleic acid particle] travelling through the air from a subject in aerosol or some other form and is caught or received by another subject who then goes on to suffer with COVID-19, the purported disease resultant or caused by a SARS-CoV-2 virus.

5) Please disclose any recorded information demonstrating the evidence that a SARS-CoV-2 virus is capable of spread, by being exhaled in sputum or other bodily fluid from a subject onto and retained on a surface [and the time period established for SARS-CoV-2 to remain as a living organism] so as to be collected or picked up by a second subject at any point within the recognised and proven timeframe.

PHE can confirm it does hold the information requested for questions 4 and 5. However, the information is exempt under section 21 of the FOI 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 we have included the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/scientific-evidence-supporting-the-government-response-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

6) Please disclose any recorded information proving that face coverings mitigate the transmission and spread of a SARS-CoV-2 virus.

PHE can confirm it does hold the information requested.

PHE has carried out a rapid review evidence review on face coverings.

PHE searched for evidence published between 25 March and 5 June, as prior to this, a large systematic review had already been undertaken. PHE identified 27 new studies (15 preprints) examining the effectiveness of face coverings in non-healthcare settings and the efficacy of different types of face coverings. The evidence was considered weak due to the study designs and publication status. Evidence from epidemiological and modelling studies suggested that the use of face coverings in the community may contribute to reducing the spread of COVID-19 and that early intervention may result in a lower peak infection rate. Evidence from modelling studies suggests that beneficial effects of wearing masks may be increased when combined with other non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as hand washing and social distancing; and limited and weak evidence from laboratory studies suggests that materials such as cotton and polyester might block droplets with a filtering efficiency similar to medical masks when folded in 2 or 3 layers.

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:

<https://phe.koha-ptfs.co.uk/cgi-bin/koha/opac-retrievefile.pl?id=5f043ca658db1188ffae74827fa650d9>

7) Please disclose the proof that a RT-PCR, Rapid antigen test or any other test is capable of identifying a SARS-CoV-2 virus.

PHE can confirm it does hold this information. However, the information is exempt under section 21 of the FOI 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 we have included the following link:

<https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.3.2000045>

Note: Real micrographic imagery is to be accepted as fundamental proof. Computer generated imagery is not to be accepted as fundamental proof.
Response

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