



By email

request-754402-920376e6@whatdotheyknow.com

Our ref: 11/05/21/tr/270

09 June 2021

Dear James Ryan,

Re: 270 - FOI Figures that prove wearing masks cuts transmission of Covid-19

Thank you for your request received on 11 May 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 hold the information you have specified.

Request

Could you please provide me with the figures that prove that wearing of face masks cut the risk of catching Covid 19

Response

PHE can confirm it holds the information you have specified.

PHE has carried out an updated rapid evidence review on the effectiveness of face coverings in the community and COVID-19, in which PHE searched for evidence published between 5 June and 22 September 2020. There were 31 new studies (8 preprints) identified, examining the effectiveness of face coverings in community (non-healthcare) settings and the efficacy of different types of face coverings.

17 observational studies, mainly ecological, consistently reported that the use of face coverings in the community reduced the spread of COVID-19. Face covering interventions were typically implemented alongside other interventions or behaviours designed to limit the spread of COVID-19, and whilst some studies controlled for this in their analyses, the extent of the effectiveness of face coverings in isolation is more difficult to determine. It is also not possible to determine the extent to which the protective effect may be due to source control, wearer protection, and/or a combination of both. Evidence from 14 laboratory simulation studies suggests that various types of face coverings can filter droplets and aerosols to some extent, suggesting that coverings of various materials are more effective than no covering, and multi-layered coverings are more effective than single-layer. Medical masks may offer better protection than fabric alternatives, provided they fit well. However, none of these simulations used SARS-CoV-2 in their experiments.

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 following link:

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

Under Section 16 of the FOI Act, public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance. You may find the following paper, which contains information about the application of face coverings in mitigating the B117 variant, to be of interest:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emg-application-of-physical-distancing-and-fabric-face-coverings-in-mitigating-the-b117-variant-sars-cov-2-virus-in-public-workplace-and-community>

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