



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Freedom of Information Team
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

www.gov.uk/dhsc

Mr Carroll

By email to: request-697601-eab52a84@whatdotheyknow.com

01 October 2021

Dear Mr Carroll,

Freedom of Information Request Reference FOI-1262496

Thank you for your request dated 10 October 2020, and apologies for the delay in our response to your query which asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC):

"Dear Department of Health and Social Care,

I am writing to make an open government request for all the information to which I am entitled under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations. In order to assist you with this request, I am outlining my query as specifically as possible. If however, this request is too wide or too unclear, I would be grateful if you could contact me as I understand that under the act, you are required to advise and assist requesters. I recently received unsolicited correspondence from Ipsos Mori, inviting me to take part in a covid-19 test study. I have absolutely no intention of ever doing so. Can I firstly ask how do I remove my name from NHS England being able to give out my details to third parties such as these without my consent? Please direct me to the relevant link, as I did not and do not give my consent for my address and name to be doled out to polesters and academia.

(i) Please disclose how many random letters such as this have been sent out in England, and please disclose methodology of how this process is carried out.

(ii) Please clarify if this randomness is carried out in totality of records held for England by NHS England, or if it is broken down by geographical areas for specific targeting, which would not make it random at all. For example, if you wanted to shut down certain areas, would it not be facilitated by mass lettering these said areas in order to illicit more tests?

(iii) Please also give a breakdown by county of how many random letters have been sent out, so that we can determine if specific areas are being targeted by stealth - such as The North of England in order to facilitate bogus statistics and local lockdowns.

(iv) The letter states Once returned to the laboratory and analysed, the test may show whether you currently have the covid-19 virus (although test results are not 100% accurate)

Please specify the actual accuracy of these tests, and on what basis confirmation of the Covid-19 virus- and by this I mean the actual virus and not amplified DNA matter, can be confirmed.

(v) Though stated that Ipsos Mori and Imperial College London staff and researchers keep information confidential, (which is a very big IF), what basis of consent do you have for then passing on said information to the test and trace service, who are also a third party to the DHSC? I understand that under the act, I should be entitled to a response within 20 working days. I would be grateful if you could confirm that you have received this request. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future via the what do they know website address..."

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Please note that this response is based on the information held at the time the department received your request and we apologise for the length of time taken to respond.

DHSC holds the information you have requested. DHSC has a statutory legal duty under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (section 11) to protect the public in England from disease and or other dangers to public health which includes conducting research to advance knowledge and understanding of them. Under the same Act, Article 6 (1)(e) the department also has the statutory authority for processing to carry out this research in the public interest.

Under this legal duty DHSC commissioned Imperial College London and Ipsos MORI to conduct research into COVID-19 and authorised NHS Digital to share a limited amount of information with Ipsos MORI for this research. More details about this process and how you can have your details removed can be found on the Ipsos MORI Q&A pages here: <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/covid-19-swab-test-faqs#nameaddress>

(i) Please disclose how many random letters such as this have been sent out in England, and please disclose methodology of how this process is carried out.

DHSC holds the information you have requested. However, as the information held by the department is in the public domain we will, under Section 21 of the FOIA (information accessible to the applicant by other means), refer you to the published source.

Sufficient letters are sent out in order to achieve the sample size required, which is calculated based on the expected response rate. The total number of households sampled for each round of the study can be found on the REACT website below: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/institute-of-global-health-innovation/REACT1-R13---REACT2-R6---Fieldwork-info-table.pdf>

(ii) Please clarify if this randomness is carried out in totality of records held for England by NHS England, or if it is broken down by geographical areas for specific targeting, which would not make it random at all. For example, if you wanted to shut down certain areas, would it not be facilitated by mass lettering these said areas in order to illicit more tests?

DHSC holds the information you have requested. Letters are sent to a nationally representative sample of the population among the 315 Lower-Tier Local Authorities (LTLAs) in England.

Participants are randomly selected from the National Health Service (NHS) list of patients registered with a general practitioner, aged five years and over. The number sent out to each of the 315 LTLAs varies depending on the response rates Ipsos MORI observed in previous rounds of the study

(iii) Please also give a breakdown by county of how many random letters have been sent out, so that we can determine if specific areas are being targeted by stealth -

such as The North of England in order to facilitate bogus statistics and local lockdowns.

DHSC holds the information you have requested. However, as the information held by the Department is in the public domain we will, under Section 21 of the FOIA (information accessible to the applicant by other means), refer you to the published source.

For each round the sample of addresses is selected entirely at random within each LTLA in England, it is not based on counties. LAs are sampled across the whole of England so they reflect the country's population density. More letters would be sent out to an LA where the previous response rate observed was lower than expected for the population density of that area. Imperial College London's published Round 5 report (to be found [HERE](#)) provides a complete breakdown of the number of addresses sampled by each LTLA. Please see the link to the data provided.

(iv) The letter states Once returned to the laboratory and analysed, the test may show whether you currently have the covid-19 virus (although test results are not 100% accurate). Please specify the actual accuracy of these tests, and on what basis confirmation of the Covid-19 virus- and by this I mean the actual virus and not amplified DNA matter, can be confirmed.

DHSC holds the information you have requested. However, as the information held by the Department is in the public domain we will, under Section 21 of the FOIA (information accessible to the applicant by other means), refer you to the published source.

The antigen (PCR) test for coronavirus is generally considered the most accurate test to detect current infection with coronavirus, more details about its' accuracy can be found in the last paragraph of page 9 report from Imperial College London here: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.07.10.20150524v1>

(v) Though stated that Ipsos Mori and Imperial College London staff and researchers keep information confidential, (which is a very big IF), what basis of consent do you have for then passing on said information to the test and trace service, who are also a third party to the DHSC?

The Department of Health and Social Care ('DHSC') commissioned the NHS Test and Trace programme on behalf of the UK government and is the data controller for the purposes of data protection legislation. DHSC decides what information is required and how it needs to be used. For further information, please see Test and Trace privacy notice here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-test-and-trace-privacy-information/test-and-trace-overarching-privacy-notice>

Ipsos MORI is contacting individuals on behalf of DHSC. Names are chosen at random from the NHS list of patients registered with a GP in England. NHS Digital has shared a limited amount of personal data so that Ipsos MORI can invite individuals to take part in this research. This data consists of:

- Name and address
- Mobile number
- NHS number

- Gender and month/year of birth

Patient information has come from the Personal Demographics Service, the national electronic database of all NHS patients registered with a GP. While patients can opt out of having their confidential patient information shared, this does not apply to the demographic information held on the Personal Demographics Service. There is more information on this in IPSOS Privacy Notice here: www.ipsos.uk/covid-swab-privacy.

You can also find more information on the Personal Demographics Service here. Background; National data opt-out - NHS Digital <https://digital.nhs.uk/services/national-data-opt-out> 04/06/2021

National Data Opt-out does not apply to this survey and only applies when confidential patient information is being used for purposes other than care for the individual. Confidential patient information includes clinical data about the individual (such as any medical conditions, prescriptions or care received), and any information about the individual that has been accessed via the individual's medical record. This survey only uses demographic data and contact details drawn from patient registration records to select and contact individuals to take part. This personal data is not classified as confidential patient information as no clinical information is used or accessed. As such, the National Data Opt-out does not apply.

If you have further questions about either of the REACT studies, you may find further answers on the FAQ pages developed for participants by our operational partners, Ipsos MORI:

Frequently asked questions about the our COVID-19 swab testing programme (REACT-1)
[External site] <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/covid-19-swab-test-faqs>

Frequently asked questions about our lateral flow antibody testing programme (REACT-2)
[External site] <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/covid-19-lateral-flow-antibody-tests-faqs>

If you are not satisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to appeal by asking for an internal review. This should be sent to freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk or to the address at the top of this letter and be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communication.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have already appealed our original response and received our internal review decision. You should raise your concerns with the ICO within three months of your last meaningful contact with us.

The ICO can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House

Water Lane
Wilmslow SK9 5AF

Website: <https://ico.org.uk/concerns>

Yours sincerely,

Le-Anne Frankson
Freedom of Information Officer
freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk