



22 October 2021

Will Maynard
fyi-request-16561-d52b86f5@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: OIA-2021/22-0177

Dear Mr Maynard

Official Information Act request regarding the efficacy of mask wearing

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 29 August 2021. You requested:

“Please provide the evidence/studies and efficacy with wearing any type of masks to prevent/reduce the spread of covid19 and any other respiratory illness, the risk and safety factors and the decision paper where it was decided to implement mask requirements.”

The time frame for responding to your request was extended under section 15A of the Act by 20 working days because it necessitated consultations to be undertaken before a decision could be made on the request. Following this extension, I am now in a position to respond.

In response to the first part of your question relating to evidence/studies supporting the efficacy of wearing any type of masks to prevent/reduce the spread of COVID-19, the following sources signpost some significant studies in relation to the role that face coverings can play in reducing transmission of COVID-19. The evidence indicates that face coverings or masks can help stop infectious droplets spreading when an infected person speaks, laughs, coughs or sneezes. This is referred to as ‘source control’.

As stated on the Centre for Disease Control website (linked below), face coverings also help reduce inhalation of these droplets by the wearer (“filtration for wearer protection”). As a result, there is a broader community benefit of both infected and susceptible (not infected) people wearing face coverings to reduce transmission; the individual protections conferred increase with increasing numbers of people using face coverings consistently and correctly.

The realised benefit of face covering policies will vary based on: the environments within which they are used; the degree of (known or unknown) community transmission; correct face covering or mask usage; and the quality/type of the face covering or masks involved.

The Office of the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor has released the following documents regarding mask wearing:

1. Masks prevent the spread of COVID-19 – 13 August 2020: A short document on the evidence base for mask wearing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 plus explanation of the different types of masks.

<https://cpb-ap-se2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.auckland.ac.nz/dist/f/688/files/2020/01/Mask-Wearing-MOH-formatted-13-08-2020.pdf>

2. Face coverings are mentioned on page 18 of our Sept-Oct-Nov 2020 Bundle Framework for assessing risk of modes of transmission of COVID-19 Draft prepared under urgency at the request of Minister Verrall – 18 November 2020.

<https://cpb-ap-se2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.auckland.ac.nz/dist/f/688/files/2021/01/Sept-Oct-Nov-Bundle-v2.pdf>

Further information is available on the following websites:

1. <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-masks-and-face-coverings-community>
2. [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak)
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>

In response to the final part of your request, I have decided to release the Cabinet paper and associated Minutes *Mandatory Face Coverings and Record Keeping for Contact Tracing Purposes*, dated 11 August 2021, subject to information being withheld as noted. The relevant grounds under which information has been withheld are:

1. Section 9(2)(f)(iv), to maintain the confidentiality of advice tendered by or to Ministers and officials;
2. Section 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion;
3. Section 9(2)(h), to maintain legal professional privilege.

In making my decision, I have taken the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Act into account.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response may be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Amber Bill
Acting Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Response