

22 December 2021

Mario Funken

By email: [fyi-request-17369-e3db7465@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-17369-e3db7465@requests.fyi.org.nz)  
Ref: H202115980

Tēnā koe Mario

### Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) received by the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 12 November 2021 as a follow up to information previously released to you under ref: H202115014. I will respond to each part of your request in turn:

*1. My question regarding antibody testing was not related to point-of-care testing for diagnostic purposes but rather laboratory based serology testing to confirm past exposure. According to the MoH website, these tests are not available to the public.*

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/assessment-and-testing-covid-19/how-covid-19-testing-works>

*Here it says "The antibody/serology test is not available publicly on request in New Zealand."*

*I since learned that this statement is false. Covid antibody serology tests are in fact publicly available on request and do not require a referral from a GP.*

*a) Why does the MoH publish this false, misleading statement on their website?*

*b) Does the MoH discourage the use of publicly available serology testing? If yes, what is the rationale behind this?*

Serology testing is not available publicly on request in New Zealand. It is currently only used in limited cases, as directed by a public health doctor, to support investigation of possible new cases or to support patient management. Clinicians or General Practitioners assess the need for a serology test and if appropriate, provide a referral to a laboratory that will process it. The Act does not support requests where an opinion, comment, argument, or hypothetical statement is put to the Ministry for response, couched as a request for information. You have made a claim that serology testing is available in New Zealand without a referral and that information published on the Ministry website is false. If you can provide more details regarding the source of this information, this may allow the Ministry to provide you with the information you are interested in.

2. Please provide the underlying sources relating to your statement that "two doses of the vaccine provide higher levels of antibodies than seen after natural infection."

Information in scope of this part of your request is attached as Appendix 1. Appendix 1 outlines the evidence to support the claim that *two doses of the vaccine provide higher levels of antibodies than seen after natural infection* from the time it was made. With COVID-19, the scientific basis of all statements continues to evolve and the Ministry is monitoring research closely. If there are new findings sufficient to provide an updated stance, it will be considered by experts and put forward for a recommendation to update this position.

3. Does the MoH consider time-dependent decay of antibody levels when making the above statement? If not, what is this decision based on?

Advice regarding this part of your request is currently under active consideration by the Ministry. At the time the above statement was made, time dependent decay of antibody levels had not yet been considered as research was in early stages. The research available currently is preliminary and requires expert interpretation, therefore, the Ministry has not finalised advice at this stage.

4. Does the MoH consider the breadth of SARS-CoV 2 antibodies when making the above statement? If not, what is this decision based on?

A clear marker for a correlate of protection, such as a specific antibody that should be assessed and is reliable to show protection based on a certain is not yet established within the literature. As such, this information is not yet helpful to assessing immunity.

5. Does the MoH consider research on the incidence of re-infections vs. breakthrough infections when assessing natural immunity? If not, what is this decision based on?

The Ministry does not assess natural immunity. As noted in the Ministry's response to question 1 of this request, assessments of serology tests are only required in specific settings and are interpreted by specialists.

Please note, the Ministry is constantly assessing emerging research into antibody levels and will continue to use scientific research to make recommendations.

Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz) or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry of Health website at: [www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases](http://www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases).

Nāku noa, nā



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