

Hon Chris Hipkins

MP for Remutaka

Minister for COVID-19 Response

Minister of Education

Minister for the Public Service

Leader of the House



Mr Anthony
fyi-request-19341-8bb112ef@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref. CHOIA262

Dear Mr Anthony,

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 14 May 2022 for:

“the peer reviewed science studies that back up cabinet's decision to require the public to wear masks to help prevent the spread of Covid-19”

While the Act allows New Zealanders to ask for information from Ministers and government departments, there is no requirement under the Act to create new information or compile information they do not hold in order to respond to requests. As Minister for COVID-19 Response, neither I nor my Cabinet colleagues undertake scientific research or studies. Therefore, your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act on the grounds that the information requested is not held.

I am advised that as part of reviewing international evidence, the Ministry considers other advice from international organisations including Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health England, the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Australian jurisdictions, and a range of scientific and medical journals. The information is collated through Ministry specialist technical advisory groups whose membership include a variety of expert professions such as infection prevention and control, public health, infectious diseases, microbiology, and primary care. When reviewing evidence, the Ministry ensures it is applicable to the New Zealand situation and can be applied in our context.

The Ministry of Health advises that evidence indicates that the use of masks in the community provide benefit in reducing SARS-CoV-2 infection. A rapid review from the Republic of Ireland that found that “the evidence within this rapid evidence update points towards face mask use in the community providing a potentially beneficial effect in reducing SARS-CoV-2 infection, alongside a lack of evidence of significant harm associated with their use.” The review is publicly available at: www.higa.ie/sites/default/files/2020-12/Use-of-face-masks-in-the-community_Rapid-evidence-update.pdf. This rapid review included the following evidence:

- A rapid review from Norway concludes that there is evidence that medical facemasks can protect people from respiratory infections in community settings. This conclusion was based on 13 observational studies, the majority of which found a benefit from the use of masks. This is publicly available at: www.fhi.no/globalassets/dokumenterfiler/rapporter/2020/should-individuals-in-the-

[community-without-respiratory-symptoms-wear-facemasks-to-reduce-the-spread-of-covid-19-update-1-report-2020-v1.pdf](#); and

- A [scientific brief](#)¹ from the CDC concludes that research supports the use of masks in the community to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and that the benefit is derived from a combination of source control and personal protection.

The Ministry of Health advises that a range of information and research is publicly available that addresses your concerns, including publicly available studies and key information supporting mask efficiency can be found here:

- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/> or <https://www.nejm.org/>
- www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-face-masks-community.:
- www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-science-news.
- www.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2020-12/Use-of-face-masks-in-the-community_Rapid-evidence-update.pdf

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 or by calling 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response