

Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall

Minister for COVID-19 Response
Minister of Research, Science and Innovation
Minister for Seniors
Associate Minister of Health



J Bruning

Email: fyi-request-19582-271b9e56@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref. CHOIA280

Dear J

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request on 9 June under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the former Minister for COVID Response, Hon Chris Hipkins. I am responding to you as the matters you raise now fall within my portfolio responsibilities. You requested:

- a. *General data (including reviews of the peer reviewed scientific literature) demonstrating that community-based masking prevents hospitalisation and death from respiratory viruses including coronaviruses and influenza.*
- b. *All recent analyses provided to yourself on the evidence in the published and peer reviewed scientific literature on the efficacy of mask wearing in communities directly relating to the period of the COVID-19 pandemic November 2019 – May 3, 2022, and the capacity for masking as intervention to prevent to (a) prevent transmission of Sars-Cov-2 infection (b) prevent hospitalisation and death from Sars-Cov-2.*
 - (i) *Please confirm that literature reviews of the scientific literature have been undertaken to understand & evaluate the evidence in the scientific literature over this period.*

Data showing breakdown by decade, age 20-29 etc., the percentage of the New Zealand population in these brackets or equivalent, that have been previously infected with Sars-Cov-2.
- d. *Data demonstrating that in communities that have already been exposed to COVID-19, that masking makes a meaningful difference in preventing hospitalisation and death.*
 - (i) *Please confirm that literature reviews of the scientific literature have been undertaken to understand & evaluate the evidence in the scientific literature over this period.*
 - d. *All reports, policies and analyses (including literature reviews of the peer reviewed scientific literature) that review/consider the potential for harm as a consequence of compulsory mask wearing in educational institutions. This includes harm arising in mental health, issues for those with hearing loss, potential for developmental delays and the potential for increased truancy and uptake in early leavers due to the requirement. This question asks that the data is broken down to identify that the Minister has considered this risk profile at pre-school level, primary level, intermediate level, secondary level and tertiary level.*
 - (i) *Please confirm that literature reviews of the scientific literature have been undertaken to understand & evaluate the evidence in the scientific literature over this period.*

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

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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 by my office.

However, it is within the Ministry of Health's (the Ministry's) role to do this, and they provide our office with a range of information and research. This is all publicly available and should address your concerns, including:

- www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-science-news
- [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-face-masks-community.:](http://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.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2020-12/Use-of-face-masks-in-the-community_Rapid-evidence-update.pdf
- 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
- www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html
- www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-case-demographics

I am advised that as part of reviewing international evidence, the Ministry considers other advice from international organisations including the 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, vaccine and immunology, testing and diagnostics, infectious diseases, microbiology, therapeutics and clinical care, and primary care. Independent literature searches and ongoing reviews of the science are also undertaken regularly. When reviewing evidence, the Ministry ensures it is applicable to the New Zealand situation and can be applied in our context.

If you desire the underlying scientific information that was used to develop the advice provided to my Office, I suggest you re-lodge this request with the Ministry of Health.

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ayesha Verrall'.

Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
Minister for COVID-19 Response