



Department of Health & Social Care

Freedom of Information Team
Department of Health and Social Care
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www.gov.uk/dhsc

Mr Horn
[request-679704-
a9f26e86@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-679704-a9f26e86@whatdotheyknow.com)

24 August 2020

Dear Mr Horn,

Freedom of Information Request Reference FOI-1243364

Thank you for your request dated 25 July 2020 in which you asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC):

Subject: Freedom of Information request - Full, accurate and complete disclosure of SARS-COV-2 virus records

Please provide a full, accurate and complete list of records held within your office, and or under your authority, describing the isolation of a SARS-COV-2 virus, directly taken from a symptomatic patient of COVID-19 where the sample was not first combined with any other source of genetic material (not limited but by way of example monkey kidney cells, aka vero cells, liver cancer cells) thereby eliminating contamination as a possible alternative source of sampling.

Please note isolation is used in the normally understood meaning of the word – the act of separating a thing from another. I am not referring, and hence not requesting, to isolation meaning the culture of something else, the performance of an amplification test (eg PCR test which only detect mRNA or DNA) or the sequencing of “something”.

If any records match the above description and are available to the public elsewhere, please provide enough information so that I may identify and access each record with certainty (i.e. title, author(s), date, journal, and weblink or location where the public may access it). I remind you full, accurate and complete disclosure is required.

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

DHSC does not hold information on the isolation of a SARS-COV-2 virus.

However, outside of the scope of the FOIA, and on a discretionary basis, the following information has been advised to us, which may be of interest. Most infectious diseases are caused by viruses, bacteria or fungi. Some bacteria or fungi have the capacity to grow on their own in isolation, for example in colonies on a petri dish. Viruses are different in that they are what we call “obligate pathogens” – that is, they cannot survive or reproduce without infecting a host. An explainer of these different types of pathogen (disease causing agents) can be found from BMC Biology here: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5648414/>

For some diseases, it is possible to establish causation between a microorganism and a disease by isolating the pathogen from a patient, growing it in pure culture and reintroducing it to a healthy

organism. These are known as “Koch’s postulates” and were developed in 1884. However, as our understanding of disease and different disease-causing agents has advanced, these are no longer the method for determining disease causation. It has long been known that viral diseases cannot be identified in this way as viruses cannot be grown in ‘pure culture’. When a patient is tested for a viral illness, this is normally done by looking for the presence of antigens, or viral genetic code in a host with molecular biology techniques.

If you have any queries in relation to the above discretionary information, we suggest that you may wish to contact the Government Office for Science (Go-Science). FOI requests may be submitted to Go-Science at contact@go-science.gov.uk.

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 submitted within two months of the date of this letter and sent to FreedomOfInformation@dhsc.gov.uk, or to the address at the top 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
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

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

Yours sincerely,

Dorothy Crowe

Freedom of Information Officer
E: freedomofinformation@dhsc.gov.uk