

10 December 2021

Mathew Ultee

By email: fyi-request-17713-95c0eec9@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: H202116914

Tēnā koe Mathew

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 30 November 2021 for information around COVID-19, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing, vaccinations, alternative treatments, ventilators, camembert cheese and related information. Rather than repeat your request verbatim, I have attached it as Appendix 1.

While the law allows New Zealanders to request official information from Ministers and government agencies, there is no requirement under the Act for the Ministry to create new information, compile information it does not hold, provide or prove an opinion or respond to hypothetical questions. Many of your questions – which are essentially a form of cross-examination – appear to be an attempt to engage in a debate about the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its vaccination programme rather than a request for information under the Act. The Act does support requests where an opinion, comment, hypothetical statement or leading question is put to the Ministry for response, couched as a request for information. Therefore, your request is refused under section 18(g) on the grounds that the information is not held by the Ministry.

However, since the global pandemic began, the Ministry and other government agencies have proactively published a significant amount of information about COVID-19 that would answer many of your questions. I want to draw your attention to the following points:

- Comprehensive information about New Zealand's COVID-19 response, including vaccination, alert levels, overseas travel and departure tests, and proactively released material received by the Minister for COVID-19 Response Hon Chris Hipkins. All this information is available on the Unite against COVID-19 website at: www.covid19.govt.nz.
- The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is the lead agency for the All-of-Government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and has published information about its work, including Cabinet papers at: <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-business-units/covid-19-group>.
- COVID-19 case numbers are published daily by the Institute of Environmental Science and Research (ESR) at: <https://nzcoviddashboard.esr.cri.nz/#/> ESR has also published a wide range of other information about the SARs CoV-2 virus and its response work at:

www.esr.cri.nz/our-expertise/covid-19-response/.

- The Ministry also publishes COVID-19 case data at www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-current-cases, COVID-19 Situation Reports at www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/general-information-releases/covid-19-situation-reports-january-november-2020 and COVID-19 vaccination data at www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-vaccine-data.
- New Zealand's Medicines and Medical Devices Authority, Medsafe, has published a range of information on the approval of COVID-19 vaccines, including safety reports for Adverse Events Following Immunisation at: www.medsafe.govt.nz/index.asp.
- Medsafe has also published information about thrombosis at www.medsafe.govt.nz/Consumers/educational-material/Thrombosis-with-Thrombocytopenia-Syndrome.pdf, vaccination and pregnancy at www.medsafe.govt.nz/safety/Alerts/covid-19-vaccination-in-pregnancy.asp, and myocarditis and pericarditis at www.medsafe.govt.nz/safety/Alerts/comirnaty-myocarditis-alert.htm amongst a range of other topics.
- The Ministry has published responses to requests under the Act, which cover many of the issues you have raised, including information on PCR testing and the isolation of the COVID-19 virus at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests and particularly the response to questions 14, 15, 16 and 17 of this response: www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202111151_response.pdf
- The Ministry also publishes information on PCR testing at: 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.
- Additionally, a range of peer reviewed scientific research about the COVID-19 virus has been published on *PubMed* by the National Center for Biotechnology Information at the National Institutes of Health in the United States at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>.
- The Ministry has published a review on a range of scientific information on COVID-19-related topics at: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-science-news. This includes information about therapeutic treatments for COVID-19 that have been approved and those (e.g., ivermectin, hydroxychloroquine) are unsupported by scientific evidence: www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/csu_09_july_2021_covid-19_pharmaceutical_treatments.pdf
- The Ministry website provides the Immunisation Handbook 2020 and under chapter 5, provides a range of information and references to scientific literature about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines. This is available at: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/immunisation-handbook-2020/5-coronavirus-disease-covid-19.

Please note, information relating to camembert cheese may be held by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). For further information, you may wish to could contact MPI directly.

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.

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.

Nāku noa, nā



Jan Torres

**Acting Manager, OIA Services
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