

17 March 2022

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s 9(2)(a)

By e-mail: s 9(2)(a)

Ref: H202201617

Tēnā koe s 9(2)(a)

## Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 17 February 2022, which on 9 March 2022 was refined to:

*“...information regarding the PCR swab samples after being transported to a lab for analysis what happens to those samples and any gathered data on said samples.”*

To be authorised to process PCR test swabs, a lab must be accredited by International Accreditation NZ (IANZ). IANZ's requirements for accreditation include a lab having standards which satisfy IANZ criteria for test swab handling, management and retention timeframes for processing

After PCR swab samples are processed by labs, all negative samples and the majority of positive samples are discarded while a small number of positive samples are forwarded to ESR for whole genome sequencing. Once ESR has completed whole genome sequencing, it then discards these samples. According to ESR's records, of the 362,687 positive cases reported in the EpiSurv database from 12am 14 Dec 2021 to 12am 14 March 2022, 1.5% (5516 cases) have had at least one sample forwarded to ESR for whole genome sequencing.

With regard to data, the number of tests processed, the number of positive and negative results and various demographic data of those tested such as age group, sex, ethnicity and district health board of domicile are forwarded to the Ministry of Health each day to be recorded in the Ministry's COVID testing statistics database and then included in the Ministry's daily updates. For positive results, the data will also include the number of community cases and cases from the border. No identifying details of any person who has been tested are forwarded to the Ministry with this data.

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 website at: [www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests](http://www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests).

Nāku noa, nā



Jo Pugh  
**(Acting) Group Manager**  
**COVID-19 Testing and Supply**