

28 April 2020

[REDACTED]

By email: [REDACTED]

Ref: H202001826

Dear [REDACTED]

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 1 April 2020 regarding COVID-19.

The full wording of your request and the Ministry's responses to each part of your request is outlined in Appendix 1, attached to this letter.

You have the right, under section 28 of the Act, to ask the Ombudsman to review my decision to refuse your request.

Yours sincerely



Jane Kelley
Director
COVID-19 Response

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Appendix 1: Information in response to each part of your request

Request:	Ministry of Health's Response:
1. When did the Ministry of Health first start testing for "COVID-19"?	22 January 2020.
2. Is the Ministry of Health administering the tests only to those displaying cold/flu symptoms? Or can those who are asymptomatic be tested for "COVID-19" also?	<p>Please refer to the following links to the Ministry's website for the advice provided to health professionals, including the case definitions and testing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-health-professionals • https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-health-professionals/case-definition-covid-19-infection
3. Could you please send copies of any instructions or advice to medical staff regarding how and who to test, when to test - test criteria. Thank-you.	
4. How many tested were displaying cold/flu symptoms at the time of testing?	<p>Your request for this information is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as this information is not held by the Ministry or another agency subject to the Act.</p> <p>For your reference, this level of information is not reported on consistently. Where available, this information is not collated in an electronic format and varies between the laboratories. Any reporting on this information will be based on an incomplete dataset.</p>
5. Is the 'testing kit' that is being used most widely to diagnose "COVID-19" in New Zealand a PCR (polymerase chain reaction/ DNA amplification technique)?	Yes, this is in line with the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) testing guidelines for COVID-19 in suspected human cases.
6. Has COVID-19 testing being done with the PCR method alone?	All the medical testing laboratories in New Zealand are only using the PCR method for testing.
7. If not, what other testing methods have been used to diagnose "COVID-19" in NZ and in how many cases that have proven positive and how many negative please?	
8. How many people in New Zealand have been tested for "COVID-19" using more than one method of testing?	
9. Of those tested, how many have tested positive for "COVID-19" using the PCR technique?	Please refer to the Ministry's website for the daily number of confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19, as all medical testing laboratories in New Zealand are only using PCR methodology for

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	testing: https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-current-situation/covid-19-current-cases
10. <i>Of those tested, how many have tested negative for “COVID-19” using the PCR technique?</i>	<p>This information is not held by the Ministry and I have no reason to believe that it is held by another agency subject to the Act, as such these parts of your request are refused under 18(g) of the Act.</p> <p>This is because the number of probable cases reported, may not have all, undergone any laboratory testing. To provide this information, all probable cases must have undergone laboratory testing, some may have undergone multiple tests, for example, hospital patients.</p>
11. <i>Of those tested using methods other than the PCR method, how many have tested positive for “COVID-19”? Please advise what method(s) were used.</i>	All the medical testing laboratories in New Zealand are only using the PCR method for testing.
12. <i>Of those tested using methods other than the PCR method, how many have tested negative for “COVID-19”? Please advise what method(s) were used.</i>	
13. <i>Have different testing methods for “COVID-19” produced differing results for a single patient? For example, one test shows the person is positive for “COVID-19” and another test has shown the patient negative. If so, in how many patient cases?</i>	
14. <i>Is it true that the PCR test for “COVID-19” is not able to show what the cause of a patient’s disease is, nor what they died from, [1]?</i>	This information is not held by the Ministry and I have no reason to believe that it is held by another agency subject to the Act, as such these parts of your request are refused under 18(g) of the Act.
15. <i>Is it true that if a patient gets sick, any virus can be picked up by the PCR test and then blamed for a death, when it may not be the cause of the death?</i>	You may wish to refer to the WHO and Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) websites for this information.
16. <i>What kind of test did the woman undergo who was named as the first death in NZ attributed to “COVID-19”? (It reported by RNZ on March 29, 2020 that New Zealand had had its first death from Covid-19? [2])</i>	Your request for this information is refused under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.
17. <i>How was it proven that “COVID-19” was the cause of her death?</i>	

<p>18. Is the PCR test able to isolate "COVID-19" from all other similar viruses? If so, could you please provide evidence to support this claim.</p>	<p>This information is not held by the Ministry and I have no reason to believe that it is held by another agency subject to the Act, as such these parts of your request are refused under 18(g) of the Act.</p>
<p>19. Is it true that the PCR test for "COVID-19" tests for any strain of Corona virus and will lead to false positives?</p>	<p>You may wish to refer to the WHO and Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) websites for this information.</p>
<p>20. Is the Ministry of Health concerned that the PCR test is regarded as an ineffective diagnosing tool for "COVID-19" according to CDC-006-00019, Revision 02 [1] which indicates the test is unreliable? If not, why not?</p>	<p>As per section 2 of the Act, these two parts of your request do not constitute a request under the Act, as it is not a request for official information.</p>
<p>21. Is the Ministry of Health concerned that the WHO has stated that PCR tests lead to false negatives and false positives [3]? (False positives caused by contamination or the non-specific hydrolysis of primers) and false negatives (caused by factors such as poor sample quality, inefficient extraction of nucleic acids or the presence of reaction inhibitors). If not, why not?</p>	