

1 September 2020

By email: [REDACTED]
Ref: H202006281

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 19 August 2020 for:

*"In your response dated 30/07/2020 with a reference number of H202005103 to an OIA request made by [REDACTED] you stated that of the 22 COVID-19 deaths in New Zealand only 17 of the deceased had tested positive for COVID-19, How then can the remaining five fatalities be confirmed as COVID-19 deaths?
Why has the number of 22 deaths been reported to media when only 17 of these deaths can be scientifically confirmed as COVID-19 deaths?
Of all the claimed COVID-19 fatalities how many had pre-existing health conditions?
Of those with pre-existing health conditions how many of those had health conditions which could likely & reasonably lead to death if untreated?"*

My responses to your questions are as follows:

"In your response dated 30/07/2020 with a reference number of H202005103 to an OIA request made by [REDACTED] you stated that of the 22 COVID-19 deaths in New Zealand only 17 of the deceased had tested positive for COVID-19, How then can the remaining five fatalities be confirmed as COVID-19 deaths? Why has the number of 22 deaths been reported to media when only 17 of these deaths can be scientifically confirmed as COVID-19 deaths?"

As explained in the response to H202005103, the four cases that tested negative and the one case who was not tested, were classified as probable cases based on the case definition:

- A close contact of a confirmed case that has a high exposure history, meets the clinical criteria and for whom testing cannot be performed; or
- A close contact of a confirmed case that has a high exposure history, meets the clinical criteria, and has a negative PCR result but it has been more than 7 days since symptom onset before their first negative PCR test was taken.

The Ministry has made guidelines for certifying the cause of death for people who died of, or with COVID-19 available on the Ministry website at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/regulation-health-and-disability-system/burial-and-cremation-act-1964/completing-death-documents/covid-19-deaths>. It includes guidance for certifying deaths due to COVID-19 developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) which can be found at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1205.0.55.001>. The ABS guidance is based on World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, so it is applicable to all countries. Due to

the public health importance of COVID-19, the WHO have directed that the new coronavirus strain be recorded as the underlying cause of death (ie, the disease or condition that initiated the train of morbid events) on the Medical Certificate Cause of Death when it is recorded as having caused or contributed to death.

Where COVID-19 is recorded as the underlying cause of death, the death is included in the total number of confirmed COVID-19 deaths in New Zealand, hence why these 5 deaths are included in the total number of COVID-19 deaths in New Zealand.

“Of all the claimed COVID-19 fatalities how many had pre-existing health conditions? Of those with pre-existing health conditions how many of those had health conditions which could likely & reasonably lead to death if untreated?”

Of the 22 COVID-19 deaths in New Zealand, 11 had underlying conditions recorded in EpiSurv. These contributing factors are not stated in the records, therefore, the Ministry does not hold information on whether those underlying conditions could lead to death if untreated. As such, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

EpiSurv is a web-based application that collates notifiable disease information on a real-time basis from the Public Health Services in New Zealand.

I trust that this information fulfils your request. Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website.

Yours sincerely



Jane Kelley
Director
COVID-19 Health System Response