

15 February 2022

§ 9(2)(a)

By email: § 9(2)(a)
Ref: H202200466

Tēnā koe § 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 20 January 2022 for information relating to the long-term efficacy of face masks. I shall respond to each part in turn:

What has this Government done to look at the adverse effects of long-term wearing of masks such as N95, surgical and cloth masks?

To date, there is no data on any long-term studies on the adverse effects of wearing a face mask. However, face masks do help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and you should wear one whenever you can. COVID-19 spreads by droplets, so face masks are a way we can protect ourselves and others. For more information, please see our Unite Against Covid webpage: www.covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/keep-up-healthy-habits/wear-a-face-mask.

Although there are some risks with wearing masks, they are mostly minor. They include facial irritation and dermatitis, headaches and discomfort. Difficulties in breathing may arise for patients with respiratory conditions. However, for the vast majority of the population, wearing a mask does not have a significant physiological impact on carbon dioxide or oxygen levels in the blood. There are no significant differences in blood carbon dioxide or oxygen concentration between those who wear masks and those who do not.

Some individuals with chronic respiratory conditions report increased breathing difficulty wearing a mask. However, no decrease in oxygen saturation or increase in carbon dioxide retention was identified in a group of elderly men with chronic obstructive lung disease wearing standard surgical mask. Although mask use may be uncomfortable, it is imperative that healthy individuals engage with mask wearing so we have the best possible chance of preventing contracting COVID-19 or passing it on to others in your family/community.

What studies have our Ministry of Health done with regard to adverse effects of long-term wearing of masks?

What studies has the Ministry of Health used when advising on adverse effects of long-term wearing of masks?

Has the Government or Ministry of Health considered any cost/benefit ratio in advocating the use of masks

The Ministry does not conduct scientific research or studies. Please refer to online scientific studies for further information: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>.

However, the Ministry is constantly reviewing international studies and evidence on mask wearing in the community setting. Our current advice aligns with that of the World Health Organization (WHO): [www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](http://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak).

As part of reviewing international evidence, the Ministry considers other advice from international organisations including Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health England, the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Australian jurisdictions and a range of scientific and medical journals.

The information is collated through Ministry specialist technical advisory groups whose membership include a variety of expert professions such as infection prevention and control, public health, infectious diseases, microbiology and primary care. When reviewing evidence, we ensure it is applicable to the current New Zealand situation and can be applied in our context. Please note the Ministry of Health does not conduct scientific research or studies.

The Ministry also regularly updates the Science News page for up to date information regarding COVID-19 and the Vaccine: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-science-news>. For further face mask information please refer to the 23 July 2021 update.

I trust 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. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



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