



17 November 2022

§ 9(2)(a)

By email: § 9(2)(a)

Ref: H2022012603

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 Manatū Hauora on 14 September 2022 for information regarding COVID-19 reporting. You requested:

"I understand that you are changing from reporting COVID numbers daily, to reporting weekly. People are questioning why this change, which both systematically reduces the PR impact of daily reporting COVID death numbers resulting from the failure to keep COVID out of New Zealand and increases the friction for researchers monitoring for the inevitable boom in case numbers, was made.

1) Please provide all information held by MoH in regards this decision, preferably in electronic form, this should include internal reports and communications with other agencies and ministers.

2) The Official Information Act does not only cover documents, but information held by employees of an agency subject to such. In discussions regarding the change from daily to weekly reporting, was the impact on public perception of weekly reporting vs. daily reporting mentioned by any participant at any point, and if so, in what context?"

On 13 October 2022, the due date for responding to your request was extended pursuant to section 15A of the Act as consultations that are necessary to make a decision on the request are such that a proper response to the request cannot reasonably be made within the original time limit. Please accept our apologies for the delay in communicating a decision on your request.

Two documents have been identified within scope of your request, as itemised in the appendix overleaf. Where information is withheld under section 9 of the Act, I have considered the countervailing public interest in release in making this decision and consider that it does not outweigh the need to withhold at this time.

The move to reporting COVID-19 data on a weekly basis reflects the change in the pandemic response and the frequency of reporting aligns with the reporting of other communicable diseases, which are reported on either weekly (influenza during the annual flu season) or monthly (for other notifiable diseases).

Other countries, such as Australia, have made a similar decision to adjust the frequency of COVID-19 reporting. Australia is moving to weekly reporting from the end of this week. The weekly figures will continue to include seven-day averages for case numbers, deaths and hospitalisations. In addition, from late September Manatū Hauora started publishing each week its analysis of trends and insights based on the latest collected COVID-19 data.

It's important to note that while we have moved to reporting weekly rather than daily, daily case data has continued to be publicly available to media and research organisations.

Manatū Hauora will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation, as we have done since the start of the pandemic, and more frequent reporting can be reactivated in future, should that be required.

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.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

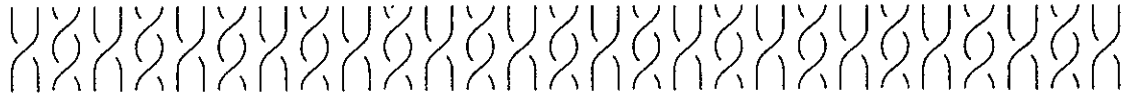
Nāku noa, nā



Dr Andrew Old
Deputy Director-General
Public Health Agency | Te Pou Hauora Tūmatanui

Appendix 1: List of documents for release

#	Date	Document details	Decision on release
1	26 August 2022	Memo: <i>Discontinuing the Daily COVID-19 Situational Report</i>	Released in full
2	9 September 2022	Memo: <i>COVID-19 Weekly Situation Report: Joint Paper from Te Whatu Ora and Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauoroa</i>	Released with some information withheld under the following sections of the Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9(2)(a) – to protect personal privacy;• 9(2)(g)(i) – to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any public service agency or organisation in the course of their duty.



Memo

Discontinuing the Daily COVID-19 Situational Report

Date: 26 August 2022

To: Dr Diana Sarfati, Director-General of Health

Copy to: Dr Andrew Old, Deputy Director-General, Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauora
Peter Abernethy, Manager Media, Manatū Hauora
Chris Scahill, Group Manager, National Coordination and Response, Te Whatu Ora
Matt Hannant, Director Outbreak and Response, Te Whatu Ora
Dave Henderson, Lead, Intelligence Surveillance & Knowledge Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauora

From: Kelsey Bilek, Acting Manager, Intelligence and Data Analytics, Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauora

For your: Approval

Purpose of Report

1. This memo seeks your agreement to discontinue the COVID-19 Daily Situational Report (SitRep). It is proposed that the SitRep ceases immediately following your approval.
2. This memo also responds to an action item from Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Minister for COVID-19 Response. At a meeting on 15 August 2022, it was requested that Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) review the feasibility of moving from daily to weekly reporting.

Background

3. The Intelligence and Analytics Team, within the now disestablished COVID-19 Directorate, developed the SitRep in August 2020 to provide critical daily updates to inform the response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Aotearoa New Zealand. The report has subsequently evolved into the current summary that is circulated each weekday at 11:00AM and 1:30PM.
4. As Aotearoa transitioned to a post-elimination landscape, decision-makers have increasingly found that as the pandemic shifted, the development of reporting has led to a surplus of redundant information.



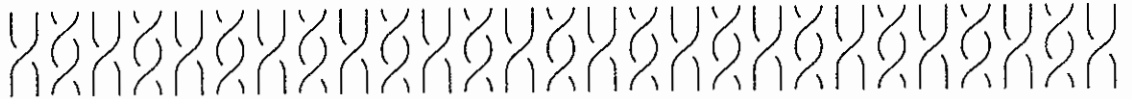
Ending the SitRep

5. The SitRep canvasses information that has been used to inform COVID-19 outbreak response. However, as the national strategy has shifted from elimination to mitigation, the need for daily reporting on these figures has become less necessary. Instead, trends and ongoing insights have become the critical input to decision making.
6. In addition, the creation of the daily report requires significant capacity from the Intelligence and Analytics Team. This is in regard to both the coding and 'pulling' of data, as well as the creation of the report itself. Increasing capacity will allow the team to focus on other areas of reporting, particularly to support the development and ongoing servicing of equity-specific Trends and Insights reports.
7. Following the discontinuation of the SitRep, the Intelligence and Analytics Team will maintain the infrastructure required to re-establish the report as required, allowing the team to create a complete or partial COVID-19 SitRep on an ad hoc basis.

Maintaining COVID-19 Intelligence

8. It is important to note that following discontinuation of the SitRep key stakeholders, including but not limited to responsible Ministers, the Director-General of Health and the Deputy Director-General, Public Health, will continue to have access to information about COVID-19 cases, hospitalisations and deaths through the following outputs including:
 - a. *Daily Signal Text* – The Intelligence and Analytics Team will work with the National Coordination and Response Team to ensure that daily case numbers, hospitalisations and deaths are still included in the Signal Text. This will continue to be sent out each morning (7-days per week).
 - b. *1pm Media Statement* – We will continue to provide the Media Team with the key details needed to inform the daily 1PM statement published seven days per week (noting that this too is in the process of transitioning to a weekly update).
 - c. *Website Updates* – We will continue to work with the Web Team to update the COVID-19 Data and Statistics webpage as well as the webpages inclusive on a daily basis (7-days per week).¹
 - d. *Trends and Insights Report (T&I)* – The Intelligence and Analytics Team produces this weekly report, which is disseminated on Fridays at 12PM and comments on emerging trends including cases, hospitalisations and deaths. It also includes updates on international COVID-19 trends and the latest scientific insights regarding outbreak management. The overall purpose of the T&I is to answer the "so what" of the reported data, providing a better tool to inform COVID-19-related decision making.

¹ <https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics>



Next Steps

9. The Public Health Agency (PHA) is working to consolidate COVID-19 and other disease reporting (communicable and non-communicable) as we look ahead to manage diseases and conditions that affect all New Zealanders.

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

1.	Approve	The discontinuation of the daily COVID-19 SitRep immediately following your approval.	Yes/No
2.	Note	That critical information pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic will remain available through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signal Text (daily) • 1pm Media Statement (daily) • Website Updates (daily) • Trends and Insights Report (weekly) 	Noted ✓

Signature



Date:

Kelsey Bilek

**Acting Manager Intelligence and Data Analytics
Intelligence Surveillance & Knowledge
Public Health Agency**

Signature



Date:

26/8/22

Dr Diana Sarfati

**Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora
Director-General of Health**

Memo

COVID-19 Weekly Situation Report: Joint Paper from Te Whatu Ora and Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauora

To	Fepulea'i Margie Apa, Chief Executive Te Whatu Ora; Dr Diana Sarfati, Director-General of Health, Manatū Hauora	Tracking No.	N/A
Copy	Nick Chamberlain, National Director, National Public Health Service Dr Andrew Old, Deputy Director-General, Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauora Rachael Hopkins, Group Manager Office of the Director Outbreak Response, National Public Health Service, Te Whatu Ora Rachel Dillon, Group Manager Office of the Director, National Immunisation Programme, Te Whatu Ora	Date	9/09/2022
From	Matt Hannant, Director Outbreak Response, National Public Health Service; Dave Henderson, Lead Intelligence Surveillance and Knowledge, Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauora		

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Matt Hannant	Director Outbreak Response, National Public Health Service, Te Whatu Ora	s 9(2)(a)	x
Dave Henderson	Lead Intelligence Surveillance and Knowledge, Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauora		

Purpose

1. This Memo provides you with background information regarding a stocktake of COVID-19 reporting that was undertaken by Outbreak Response, Te Whatu Ora and Intelligence, Surveillance and Knowledge (ISK), Public Health Agency, Manatū Hauora. It also outlines the development of a new, cross-agency COVID-19 Weekly Situational Report to consolidate the suite of reporting across agencies, provided on an exceptions basis.
2. Attached at **appendix one** is a draft template of this new report for your review and approval.

Recommendations

3. Te Whatu Ora and Manatū Hauora recommend that you:
 - a **Agree** to the establishment of the new COVID-19 Weekly Situation Report jointly commissioned and produced by Outbreak Response and ISK Agree/ Disagree
 - b **Agree** the process for compiling and providing the new report to Ministers: for all content to be provided jointly from Outbreak Response and ISK to Ministers and executives concurrently Agree/ Disagree
 - c **Note** all other COVID-19 specific reports will be gradually decommissioned Agree/ Disagree



Matt Hannant
Interim Director, Outbreak Response
National Public Health Service
Te Whatu Ora
Date: 8/09/2022



Dave Henderson
Lead Intelligence, Surveillance and Knowledge
Public Health Agency
Date: 9/09/2022



Fepulea'i Margie Apa
Chief Executive
Te Whatu Ora
Date: 9/9/2022

Dr Diana Sarfati
Director-General of Health
Manatū Hauora
Date:

Background

Ministers have indicated their desire for more condensed and easily digestible COVID-19 reporting

4. In early August 2022, Ministers signalled to Te Whatu Ora and Manatū Hauora officials that the regular COVID-19 reporting they were receiving was:
 - a. no longer necessary given the transition towards normalising COVID-19 as business-as-usual activity
 - b. information heavy but lacking clear and concise analysis that enabled Ministers to readily interpret and digest information.
5. In light of this, Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall's Office requested that Te Whatu Ora and Manatū Hauora review its respective reporting with the intent of only providing key information that Ministers should be made aware of because it is either:
 - a. Noteworthy
 - b. has associated risks that may need future decisions to be made
 - c. could be picked up by the media or;
 - d. is a significant enough change or new development.

Outbreak Response and ISK undertook a review of its reporting and made recommendations to the Minister's Office regarding the decommissioning of certain reports

6. In response to this request, officials from Outbreak Response, and ISK undertook a stocktake of all COVID-19 reporting to Ministers, noting that the majority of COVID-19 reporting sits in these areas. By using the stocktake, officials were able to make recommendations regarding reporting that could be discontinued. The Minister's Office subsequently provided feedback on these recommendations.

Outbreak Response and ISK have identified the opportunity to condense their respective COVID-19 reporting into one, cross-agency report

7. In undertaking its respective stocktakes of COVID-19 reporting, Outbreak Response and ISK have identified an opportunity to better align and streamline reporting by condensing individual COVID-19 reporting into a new, cross-agency COVID-19 report to be provided to Ministers on a weekly basis.
8. This report is intended to reduce the risk of duplication and improve alignment of information from across Manatū Hauora and Te Whatu Ora, as well as provide more concentrated information and improved analysis.
9. Pending your comfort, the intention is that this report will supersede the majority of other COVID-19 reporting, apart from reporting that is Cabinet mandated. The weekly report will continue to be provided to Ministers separate to this report.
10. Te Whatu Ora and the PHA have worked collaboratively to develop a draft of this report titled: 'Weekly COVID-19 Situational Update'. This draft is attached at Appendix 1 for your approval.

Outbreak Response and ISK have identified a process for compiling and providing the report

11. Pending your agreement, the weekly process will be co-led by the ISK Group and Outbreak Response with the report provided from these teams to the Ministers/Associate

Ministers for COVID-19 Response and Health, given the reporting sits across both portfolios. Minister Verrall's office has confirmed they are happy with this approach.

Next steps

12. Te Whatu Ora and Manatū Hauora request that you review and approve the draft report, attached an appendix one.
13. Subject to your approval and any amendments made as a result of your feedback, we will provide a copy of the draft report to relevant Ministers offices for feedback.
14. Depending on Ministerial feedback and agreement, we intend to produce the first Regular COVID-19 Update for Ministers the week ending 16 September 2022.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

Appendix 1: Draft Report - Weekly COVID-19 Situational Update

Withheld in full under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act - to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any public service agency or organisation in the course of their duty

Released under the Official Information Act 1982