UK Health Security Agency

By email

[redacted]

Our ref: 25/01/2022/ag/2334

25 March 2022

[redacted]

Re: FOIA: SARS-COV-2 Isolation and Sequencing Experiments' Controls

Thank you for your request received on 25 January 2022 addressed to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

Request

This is a formal request for access to general records, made under the Freedom of Information Act.
Description of Requested Records:
All records in the possession, custody or control of the UK Health Security Agency (HKHSA) that contain additional details (listed below) of the so-called "virus isolation" and "whole genome sequencing" procedures/methodologies for SARS-COV-2 and results that were reported on in the publication Duration of infectiousness and correlation with RT-PCR cycle threshold values in cases of COVID-19, England, January to May 2020.
Pre-Experimental Details:

- ***The Cell Nutrient Solution (storage medium) quantity and dilution that the cell lines are stored in for preparation of the experiment***

Cell Culture - Experimental Group Details:

- ***The quantity of material from (allegedly infected) nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swab specimens that was added to the cell culture experimental group (per well)***
- ***Antibiotics Quantities for the cell culture experimental group (per well)***
- ***Antifungals Quantities for the cell culture experimental group (per well)***
- ***Fetal Bovine Serum Quantities and dilution for the cell culture experimental group (per well)***
- ***The quantity and dilution of the Cell Nutrient Solution (DMEM) used in the experimental group (per well)***
- ***The number of wells used in the experimental Group***
- ***The number of wells in the experimental group that experienced CPE***
- ***Type and quantity of UTM/VTM used in the experimental group (used in the storage of swab specimens from the patient diagnosed with "the virus" - per swab)***
- ***Any additional chemicals or components added to the experimental group, with quantities (per well)***

Cell Culture - "Mock Infected" / Control Group Details:

- ***The quantity of material from uninfected nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swab specimens that was added to the cell culture control group (per well)***
- ***Antibiotics Quantities for the cell culture control group (per well)***
- ***Antifungals Quantities for the cell culture control group (per well)***
- ***Fetal Bovine Serum Quantities and dilution for the cell culture control group (per well)***
- ***The quantity and dilution of the Cell Nutrient Solution (DMEM) used in the control group (per well)***
- ***The number of wells used in the control Group***
- ***The number of wells in the control group that experienced CPE***
- ***Type and quantity of UTM/VTM used in the control group (used in the storage of control swab specimens from a patient considered free of "the virus" - per swab)***
- ***Any additional chemicals or components added to the control group, with quantities (per well)***

"Whole Genome" Sequencing - Purity and Control Details:

- ***The degree of purity of the "virus" sample used in the sequencing experiment.***
- ***All details of the control group that was used when comparing the results of sequencing:***
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    - ***the total nucleic acid extracted from the "viral lysate" (from the experimental group), versus***
    - ***the total nucleic acid extracted from the non-viral lysate (from the control group).***

In summary, please provide all records that include any additional details of the experimental and/or control groups that were used when "isolating and sequencing the virus".
If any records match the above description of requested records and are currently available to the public elsewhere, please provide enough information about each record so that I may identify and access each one with certainty (i.e. title, author(s), date, journal, where the public may access it). Please provide URLs where possible.

In accordance with Section 1(1)(a) of the Act, UKHSA can confirm that it holds the requested information pertaining to the above questions. However, the information requested is exempt from disclosure in accordance with the Section 24(1) – National Security exemption. Section 24(1) provides that information is exempt if exemption from Section 1(1)(b) is required for the purposes of safeguarding national security. Whereby, required is taken to mean that the use of the exemption is reasonably necessary.

National security means the security of the United Kingdom and its people. The interests of national security are not limited to the actions by an individual which are targeted at the UK, its system of government or its people. Safeguarding national security also includes protecting potential targets, even if there is no evidence of an imminent attack.

Section 24(1) is a qualified exemption, which means that it is subject to the public interest test. In order to determine whether the above exemption is sufficiently engaged, UKHSA has set out below the factors it has taken into consideration in determining its disclosure position.

Factors which were considered in favour of release include:

- the public interest in transparency and commitment and the wish for UKHSA to be open and transparent;
- disclosing information to present a full picture to enable wider public scrutiny of decision making.

Factors supporting maintaining the exemption include:

- Disclosure of information would constitute very detailed technical information, transferring know how, which would directly contravene an explicit request from the World Health Organization (WHO) to Public Health England (PHE now UKHSA) in 2020 not to release or make widely available the details of culture amplification of SARS-CoV-2;
- Disclosure of this would be the detailing of exact methodology utilised in virus amplification for a designated high hazard virus, requiring containment Level 3 and could pose a threat to national and global biosecurity if provided to an unascertained or unvetted member of the public or agents with ill intent;
- Disclosure of this information would provide a significant “know how” capability that could in some circumstances be considered a biosecurity threat;
- Disclosure of this information would provide records of laboratory data to third parties and very specifically any records that may relate to identifiable patient information, which virus isolation records do;

Taking into account the above factors, whilst there is a public interest in UKHSA being open and transparent on the technologies it uses, this is outweighed by the national security threat that disclosure poses. In a time of substantial COVID-19 associated biosecurity risk towards the global health and Government sector we must ensure that we continue to protect our infrastructure.

Under Section 16, a public authority has a duty to provide advice and assistance. We have previously provided information regarding the isolation of Sars-Cov-2 that we hold, you may be able to find further sources from other organisations. For your convenience, we will provide all available information held by UKHSA.

UKHSA’s microbiology teams use the term “isolation” to mean culture in the laboratory. It is used sometimes interchangeably to mean isolation from a patient or clinical material – but usually implies that the organism has been grown in culture.

An organism is identified by looking for its unique genetic material in a clinical sample and further identification is refined and confirmed by whole genome sequencing.

The Virus Reference Laboratory at UKHSA, Colindale, London has grown the virus, SARS-CoV-2. The virus culture method has been published in the following peer-

reviewed paper: https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.32.2001483

Several strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been deposited to the European Virus Archive by UKHSA.

Please find the following links below regarding evidence of COVID-19:

- SARS-CoV-2 has been cultured and then subjected to electron microscopy. Evidence of the Electron Micrograph is available at the following link: https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2021/02/05/what-do-we-know-about-the-new- covid-19-variants/

- General information pertaining to SARS-CoV-2, which causes the disease known as COVID-19: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-background-information/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-epidemiology-virology-and-clinical-features

If you have any queries regarding this response, please refer your query to the Information Rights Team in writing in the first instance. If you remain dissatisfied and would like to request an internal review, then please contact us at the address above or by emailing InformationRights@UKHSA.gov.uk.

Please note that you have the right to an independent review by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) if a complaint cannot be resolved through the UKHSA complaints procedure. The ICO can be contacted by calling the ICO's helpline on 0303 123 1113, visiting the ICO's website at www.ico.org.uk or writing to the ICO at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely
Information Rights Team

Gmail

Re: Case ref 2334 - FOIA: SARS-COV-2 Isolation and Sequencing Experiments' Controls - Deadline 2/2

[redacted] Fri, Apr 1, 2022 at 3:47 PM

To: Information Rights <InformationRights@ukhsa.gov.uk>

Greetings,

I reject your exemption based on National Security.

SARS-COV-2 is an imaginary particle that exists only in computer software. Any information related to this fraudulent generation of genomes released will only demonstrate that the virus does not exist and is fraudulent. This information cannot hurt the public in any way. In fact, this information will increase public mental health as the UK Government has been waging psychological terrorism against the public with their Fradulent Virus Claims. This information will free people from believing that they can hurt someone by just breathing. They can rid themselves of this terrorism for good.

There is no possibility that by releasing control information for experiments that poison and starve cell cultures, or for an experiment that generates a fake genetic sequence will harm anyone.

Using National Security is just an acknowledgement that you are protecting key individuals who are guilty of scientific fraud. This is not a valid usage of the Freedom Of Information Act.

Please release the records requested or I will have to object with the Ombudsman.

Regards

[Quoted text hidden]

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UK Health Security Agency

By email

[redacted]

Our ref: 01/04/22/ag/005

03 May 2022

[redacted]

Re: Case ref 2334 - FOIA: SARS-COV-2 Isolation and Sequencing Experiments' Controls

I refer to your email of 1 April 2022 which is being treated as a request for an internal review of the handling of case reference 2334, in relation to your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) "the Act".

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has taken responsibility for requests previously addressed to Public Health England.

Your request case ref: 2334

UKHSA received your information request on the 25 January 2022.

Under Section 10(1) of the Act, a public body, such as UKHSA is required to 'respond to requests promptly' and no later than '20 working days … after the request is received within the organisation'. Accordingly, UKHSA had until the 22nd February 2022 to respond to your request.

Response case ref: 2334

UKHSA sent you its response on the 25 March 2022. In accordance with Section 1(1)(a) of the Act, UKHSA correctly confirmed it did hold the information you requested. However, in our response, UKHSA explained that the information requested was exempt from disclosure in accordance with the Section 24(1) – National Security exemption.

Section 24(1) provides that information is exempt if exemption from Section 1(1)(b) is required for the purposes of safeguarding national security. Whereby, required is taken to mean that the use of the exemption is reasonably necessary.

Considering factors supporting maintaining the exemption, whilst there is a public interest in UKHSA being open and transparent on the technologies it uses, this was outweighed by the national security threat that the disclosure poses.