



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Public Accountability Unit
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www.gov.uk/phe

By email

lewie.mm@outlook.com

Our ref: 11/08/21/ag/1028

07 September 2021

Dear Lewis Murphy-Munroe,

Re: FOI request

Thank you for your request received on 11 August 2021 addressed to Public Health England (PHE). In accordance with Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act), I can confirm that PHE does not hold the information you have specified.

Request

I am filing a challenge to my public health act by writing to request information of the isolation of a SARS-CoV-2 virus directly from a sample taken from a diseased patient, where the patient sample was not first combined with any other source of genetic material (ie. monkey kidney cells aka vero cells; liver cancer cells).

I am using "isolation" in the everyday sense of the word: the act of separating a thing(s) from everything else. I am not requesting records where "isolation of SARS-CoV-2" refers instead to:

*-the culturing of something, or
-the performance of an amplification test (i.e a PCR test), or -the sequencing of something.*

To conclude, I am requesting all such records that are in the possession, custody or control of Public Health England (for example: downloaded to a computer, printed in hard copy, etc.).

Response

In accordance with Section 1(1)(a) of the FOI Act, PHE can confirm that it does not hold the information you have requested.

Viruses are not independent living entities. They require a host cell substrate to replicate.

1

PHE'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 PHE, 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->



Done 1028 - FOI Isolation of SARS-CoV...

**Response**

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

PHE's culture work on other SARS-CoV-2 variants is in progress and has not been published in any peer-reviewed papers at present.

Under Section 16, a public authority has a duty to provide advice and assistance. Accordingly, 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 the information that has been supplied to you, please refer your query to me 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 foi@phe.gov.uk.

Please note that you have the right to an independent review by the Information Commissioner's Office if a complaint cannot be resolved through the PHE complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner's Office 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
FOI Team

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