



Cabinet Office

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Marc Horn

By email :[Request-679848-f291cd75@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:Request-679848-f291cd75@whatdotheyknow.com)

FOI Reference: FOI2020/10121

18/08/2020

Dear Marc Horn

I refer to your request where you asked:

*“Freedom of Information request - Full, accurate and complete disclosure of SARS-COV-2 virus isolation records*

*Dear Cabinet Office,*

*Please provide a full, accurate and complete list of records held within your office, and or under your authority, describing the isolation of a SARS-COV-2 virus, directly taken from a symptomatic patient of COVID-19 where the sample was not first combined with any other source of genetic material (not limited but by way of example monkey kidney cells, aka vero cells, liver cancer cells) thereby eliminating contamination as a possible alternative source of sampling.*

*Please note isolation is used in the normally understood meaning of the word – the act of separating a thing from another. I am not referring, and hence not requesting, to isolation meaning the culture of something else, the performance of an amplification test (eg PCR test which only detect mRNA or DNA) or the sequencing of “something”. If any records match the above description and are available to the public elsewhere,*

*please provide enough information so that I may identify and access each record with certainty (i.e. title, author(s), date, journal, and weblink or location where the public may access it).*

*I remind you full, accurate and complete disclosure is required.”*

I am writing to advise you that following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that the information you requested is not held by the Cabinet Office.

You may wish to try contacting Public Health England, who may be able to help you with your request. at [FOI@phe.gov.uk](mailto:FOI@phe.gov.uk)

With respect to your request we have been advised on the following:

Coronavirus Disease, or Covid-19, is caused by a new virus called SARS-CoV-2. Most infectious diseases are caused by viruses, bacteria or fungi. Some bacteria or fungi have the capacity to grow on their own in isolation, for example in colonies on a petri dish. Viruses are different in that they are what we call “obligate pathogens” – that is, they cannot survive or reproduce without infecting a host. An explainer of these different types of pathogen (disease causing agents) can be found from *BMC Biology* here: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5648414/>

For some diseases, it is possible to establish causation between a microorganism and a disease by isolating the pathogen from a patient, growing it in pure culture and reintroducing it to a healthy organism. These are known as “Koch’s postulates”, and were developed in 1884. However, as our understanding of disease and different disease-causing agents has advanced, these are no longer the method for determining disease causation. It has long been known that viral diseases cannot be identified in this way as viruses cannot be grown in ‘pure culture’. When a patient is tested for a viral illness, this is normally done by looking for the presence of antigens, or viral genetic code in a host with molecular biology techniques.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact the FOI Team quoting the reference number above.

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request or wish to request an internal review, you should write to:

Eirian Walsh Atkins  
Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AS

email: [foi-team@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:foi-team@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

You should note that the Cabinet Office will not normally accept an application for internal review if it is received more than two months after the date that the reply was issued. If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by Cabinet Office. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF

*Yours sincerely*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Khan', written in a cursive style.

*FOI Team  
Cabinet Office*