

25 March 2020

Dear Ms McGuinness

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) which was transferred from the Office of the Minister of Health to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) and received on 2 March 2020 for:

*"Given this background, and the text (far below in New Zealand's Influenza Pandemic Plan (2017)), I would appreciate answers to the following questions (as an OIA):*

- 1. How many ICU beds does New Zealand currently have (with medical ventilators) and how many are currently being used?*
- 2. How many other respiratory devices (such as CPAPs) does New Zealand currently have and do medical professionals consider they are useful (e.g. are they able to be repurposed into medical ventilators)?*
- 3. Do we have a Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) like in the US? If yes, what equipment do we have in our stockpile?*
- 4. Does the New Zealand Government think that we have enough ICU beds and other respiratory devices (such as CPAP's)? If not, how many do we need and what actions are the New Zealand government doing to ensure that there is sufficient?*
- 5. Has the MoH been in contact with suppliers or other organisations based in New Zealand that might be capable of manufacturing medical ventilators in preparation for possible outbreaks?*
- 6. For example, has the New Zealand government approached New Zealand manufactures to see if they are capable of manufacturing medical ventilators and CPAP's?*
- 7. Has New Zealand started manufacture using its inshore capability of P2 grade masks (as noted in the plan – see image 4)? If not, can you explain why not. For example, is it because New Zealand no longer has that capability or you think we have enough masks for this type of virus?*
- 8. Is the pandemic plan under review given the specific characteristics of this virus (i.e. some patients need long time ICU bed care)? (I imagine an Appendix could be added to the existing plan specifying the Government's response to the coronavirus virus.)*

*Lastly, I have a concern that the communication from Government is not ideal. Telling people not to panic and that the government has everything under control will only create more panic if what the government says proves to be incorrect. A better way might be to say something like the following:*

- a. We need all New Zealanders to be vigilant and careful at this time.*
- b. The incubation period is long and can spread before symptoms show, therefore we all need to be on guard. For example: businesses need to prepare now in case they need to operate on smaller staff numbers or staff working from home and schools need to consider ways they can continue to educate students while they are at home.*
- c. We are working on supply chain issues. New Zealand is a major food maker (not taker) so there will be food for all. However we also welcome households keeping two/three weeks of food in the house as this is also good practice for earthquakes and all other natural disasters.*
- d. The government is reviewing the 2017 plan in line with the nature and characteristics of this virus and more information will be made available as the government works through these issues (as noted above this could be in the form of a new appendix 'issued in draft for consultation' to form part of the existing New Zealand's Influenza Pandemic Plan 2017)."*

You have requested a substantial and extensive amount of information regarding COVID-19. At this time, the Ministry, along with many other agencies, have diverted significant resources to support the Government's response to COVID-19. This is a fast-evolving situation and the Ministry must

continue to respond at pace to this global pandemic. To provide this information would require an extensive and substantial amount of manual research and collation, at a time the Ministry is responding to a global pandemic. Unfortunately, your request for this information is refused under section 18(f) of the Act at this time.

The Government is committed to the COVID-19 response, including keeping the New Zealand public well informed.

This is a fast-evolving global situation and this office, along with many other agencies, have diverted significant resources to support the response to COVID-19.

The Ministry knows there is significant public interest in COVID-19 and is responding to the substantial increase in demand for information from interested or concerned members of the public.

We are working hard to ensure the New Zealand public is fully informed about the work being done to respond to COVID-19. The Ministry is committed to transparency and intends to make official information publicly available as soon as possible. This includes key advice papers to Ministers, situational reports and will cover your request.

You may be interested to know the information will be published as soon as possible on the Ministry's 'Information Releases' page found here: <https://www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases>.

Information about the number of COVID-19 tests available, self-isolation measures and the case definition (when a person will be referred for testing) is available on the New Zealand Parliament and Ministry websites. You might also be interesting in watching the media briefings where these topics have been explored.

For your reference:

Information about testing kits and enforcement of self-isolation was debated in recent oral parliamentary questions in Parliament: [https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb\\_20200319\\_20200319\\_08](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20200319_20200319_08)

Information about the case definition, testing, and self-isolation is available at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>.

Information about confirmed and probable cases are now available on the Ministry website and is updated regularly: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-current-cases>.

Information on the Nation Reserve Supplies are publicly available on the Ministry website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/emergency-management/national-reserve-supplies>.

New Zealand has a domestic manufacturer of P2 (N95) and general purpose (surgical) face masks. The domestic manufacturer continues to make P2 masks. The Ministry is working with the domestic manufacturer to maintain production of masks for the health sector.

The Ministry routinely publishes the latest on the Government's response on the COVID-19 section of the Ministry's website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19>

[novel-coronavirus.](#)

Under section 28 of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request.

Thank you for taking the time to write to the Ministry.

## **OIA Services**

Government Services

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