

133 Molesworth Street
PO Box 5013
Wellington 6140
New Zealand
T+64 4 496 2000

12 October 2020

Bronwyn Pullar

By email: fyi-request-13792-d59158c8@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H202007137

Dear Bronwyn Pullar

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 14 September 2020 for information regarding the traveller who left New Zealand on 21 July 2020 and later tested positive for COVID-19 upon arrival in South Korea on 22 July 2020.

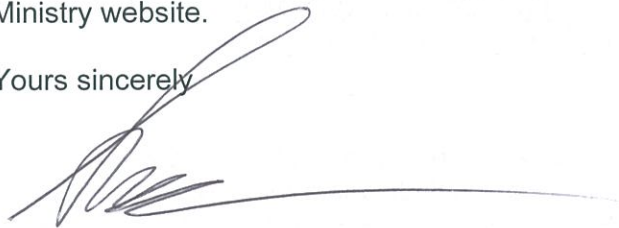
The full wording of your request and the Ministry of Health's (the Ministry) response to each part of your request, is attached as Appendix One to this letter.

I recognise that there is significant public interest in this case. The Ministry has commented about the case through its media releases, which are available at:
<https://www.health.govt.nz/news-media/media-releases>

Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website.

Yours sincerely



Sue Gordon
Deputy Chief Executive
Covid-19 Health System Response Directorate

Appendix One:

| Request | Response |
|--|--|
| <p>“1. What steps, if any, have NZ Health Officials and ESR taken to establish the genome sequencing of the strain of Covid-19 virus acquired by the 22 year old traveller who left NZ on 21 July 2020 and tested positive via a Rapid Test upon arrival in South Korea on 22 July 2020, and again tested positive in the subsequent PCR tests requested by NZ Health Officials to rule out the possibility of a false positive test result?</p> | <p>The Ministry made contact with the Republic of Korea National IHR¹ Focal Point (NFP) on this matter. The correspondence has been withheld in full pursuant to section 6(b)(i) of the Act, as making this information available would be likely to prejudice the entrusting of information to the Government of New Zealand on a basis of confidence by the Government and the agencies of the Government of the Republic of Korea (South Korea).</p> |
| <p>2. Did NZ Health Officials and ESR ask their counterparts in South Korean to provide the genome sequence the Covid-19 virus for the 22 year old traveller who departed NZ on 21 July 2020 and tested positive upon arrival in South Korea on 22 July 2020? If not, why not?</p> | |
| <p>3. Did NZ Health Officials and ESR ask their counterparts in South Korean to provide a sample of the Covid-19 virus acquired for the 22 year old traveller who departed NZ on 21 July 2020, then tested positive upon arrival in South Korea on 22 July 2020, so that genome sequencing could be performed in NZ? If not, why not?</p> | |
| <p>4. Have ESR and the NZ Health Officials established the genome sequence for the virus acquired by the 22 year old traveller who departed NZ on 21 July 2020 and tested positive upon arrival in South Korea on 22 July 2020? If not, why not? If so, what is the specific genome sequence?</p> | <p>Please refer to Written Parliamentary Question 15837 (2020) available at: https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/order-paper-questions/written-questions/document/WQ_15837_2020/15837-2020-dr-shane-reti-to-the-health-minister-chris</p> |
| <p>5. What steps, if any, have NZ Health Officials and ESR taken to establish the NZ source of the Covid-19 virus acquired by the 22 year old traveller who left NZ on 21 July 2020 and tested positive via a Rapid Test upon arrival in South Korea on 22 July 2020?</p> | <p>New Zealand health officials considered a number of theories, including that the source was within New Zealand. New Zealand health officials have reviewed relevant epidemiological information available including the individual’s movements prior to leaving the country, in order to identify any potential source of the virus. To date the Ministry has not been able to identify the source and may never.</p> |

¹ IHR – International Health Regulations

| Request | Response |
|---|---|
| <p>6. What steps, if any, have NZ Health Officials and ESR taken to establish whether, or not, the strain of Covid-19 virus acquired by the 22 year old traveller who left NZ on 21 July 2020, and then tested positive upon arrival in South Korea on 22 July 2020, is the same strain as the current Auckland community outbreak where the Americold Mount Wellington worker was it's first known case?</p> | <p>Please refer to the Ministry's response to question 4.</p> |
| <p>7. On 28 July 2020, Chris Hipkins Minister of Health confirmed in relation to the 22 year old Korean traveller that "NZ Health Officials have had very valuable exchange of information with South Korean counterparts over the case of the traveller, and that work is continuing". Please confirm what "valuable information" has been exchanged between NZ and South Korean health officials during the course of this ongoing investigation?</p> | <p>This information has been withheld in full pursuant to section 6(b)(i) of the Act, as making this information available would be likely to prejudice the entrusting of information to the Government of New Zealand on a basis of confidence by the Government and the agencies of the Government of the Republic of Korea (South Korea).</p> |
| <p>8. On 28 July 2020, Chris Hipkins Minister of Health confirmed in relation to the 22 year old Korean traveller that 170 close contacts had been identified? How many of those 170 close contacts were tested for Covid-19 and how many times were each of those 170 contacts tested?</p> | <p>For the case in question, 21 close contacts were identified, contacted and completed self-quarantine. Of these, 19 were tested and all returned negative test results.</p> <p>A further 309 individuals were identified as casual contacts and 302 were successfully contacted. Test results are available for 164 of these casual contacts which were all negative.</p> |
| <p>9. Have any individuals identified as close or casual contacts to the South Korean traveller, or contacts of those close or casual contacts, since tested positive for Covid-19?</p> | <p>Close and casual contacts cannot be compelled to have a test.</p> |
| <p>10. Have NZ Health Officials investigated links between the current outbreak in Auckland and the 22 year old South Korean traveller. If so, what specifically are these links?</p> | <p>A full case investigation was undertaken there were no epidemiological or genomic links established.</p> |
| <p>11. Have Health Officials found any epidemiological or genomic link between the current outbreak in Auckland and the 22 year old South Korean traveller? If so, what are these links?</p> | |

| Request | Response |
|---|--|
| <p>12. NZ Health officials confirmed the 22 year old South Korean traveller visited the King Club Pool Hall in Botany on 16 July 2020. Were employees and patrons of the King Club Pool Hall in Botany, also in attendance on 16 July 2020, been tested for Covid-19? If not, why not? If so, how many people were tested, and how many times was each individual tested?</p> | <p>Locations of interest are, at times, announced publicly during the early case investigation stages to encourage people to be vigilant for symptoms. In these locations, all close contacts were identified and appropriately managed (isolated and tested) and no positive cases emerged.</p> <p>The Auckland cluster investigations included searching for epidemiological links to known cases. There were no epidemiological links identified.</p> |
| <p>13. Have NZ Health Officials investigated if any of the Auckland community acquired Covid-19 cases, confirmed positive since 22 July 2020, are epidemiological linked to 22 year old infected Korean's attendance at Sylvia Park in Mount Wellington, Dressmart and Savemart in Mount Roskill, King Club Pool Hall in Botany on 16 July 2020, or to Spicy House on Dominion Road on 6 July 2020? If not, why not?"</p> | |