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11 March 2022

G Jones

By email: fyi-request-18368-472e49fc@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr/Ms Jones

Information Request – use of surgical masks and preparations for omicron.

I refer to your official information requests dated 28 January 2022 and 29 January 2022 asking for information relating to the use of surgical masks and Fire and Emergency New Zealand's preparations for the omicron variant of COVID-19. On 25 February 2022 we notified you of an extension of time to make our decision to, 11 March 2022.

Your requests have been assessed in accordance with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982 ("OIA"). Fire and Emergency's response to each of your requests is set out below.

Please note, for those requests that seek specific documents that are not held by us, we have refused your request under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act. However, we have provided information that we hope assists to answer your question. Additionally, many of your individual requests are quite broad and we have provided summaries of the relevant information in our response to those requests.

Request dated 28 January: Preparations for omicron variant

Please provide all emails, advice, guidance, strategies, doctrine, procedures, plans, memorandums, noting papers, public health guidance/advice, meeting minutes, diagrams, scenarios, photos or other documentation specifically relating Fire and Emergency New Zealand's planning for managing the impacts of the COVID-19 Omicron variant. This includes planning and procurement of personal protective equipment.

On 2 March 2022 we advised that, because of the extent of the types of information you have requested, the work to identify all documents potentially within the scope of such a broad request would be significant, and we invited you to refine your request.

To search, compile and assess all the documentation you have requested would unreasonably require the diversion of significant resources from other work. Consequently, a decision has been

made to decline this aspect of your request under section 18(f) of the OIA as the information cannot be provided without substantial collation or research.

As advised in our email of 2 March 2022, a selection of documents identified when we assessed your request are *enclosed*. We believe these documents provide an overview of our preparations regarding the Omicron variant. If you identify further documents you have an interest in, we can consider these should you make a subsequent request.

Please provide a list of the groups, committees, advisory boards and governance groups specifically relating to planning for the COVID-19 Omicron variant.

The following groups are specifically involved in Fire and Emergency's planning for the Omicron variant:

- Executive Leadership Team COVID-19 Stand Up
- Service Delivery Coordination Centre
- Service Delivery COVID-19 Leads
- COVID-19 Co-ordinating and Monitoring Group-Representatives
- National Headquarters Crisis Management Group

What guidance or advice has Fire and Emergency New Zealand received or sought advice on the suitability of N95/P2, surgical masks and face coverings against the Omicron variant.

Fire and Emergency's current protocols for mask use are reflective of current Ministry of Health (MoH) recommendations : [COVID-19: Infection prevention and control recommendations for health and disability care workers](#) | [Ministry of Health NZ](#)

In addition to following MoH recommendations in the selection of our pandemic related personal protective equipment (PPE), Fire and Emergency also consults with St John and Wellington Free Ambulance to ensure we are using PPE in a way that is consistent with other medical response agencies. Beyond this, we also consult with internal experts to ensure we are selecting the appropriate PPE, this includes reviewing product specifications.

Request of 29 January: Use of Surgical Masks

Please provide information on the current stock levels of all protective equipment used for the protection of Fire and Emergency persons against COVID-19.

Please see the below table for Fire and Emergency's national stock of pandemic related PPE held at our two equipment and distribution centres as at 17 February 2022:

Fire and Emergency NZ Pandemic related PPE Stocks as at 17 February 2022		
PPE Item	In Stock	In Transit (In)
Mask N95	28670	7200
Mask Aura	21470	
Mask Surgical	89950	35000
RAT All Types	19169	
Glasses Protective	5493	
Coveralls 5/6 & 5B/6B	17381	

Fire and Emergency NZ Pandemic related PPE Stocks as at 17 February 2022		
PPE Item	In Stock	In Transit (In)
Gloves Long Cuff	223500	
Gloves Short Cuff	402720	
Sanitiser	4939	
Goggles Anti Fog	9910	
Goggles Dr BanBao	850	
Wipes (Pack)	506	
Gowns	2955	2000
Hazard Bag	13941	
Mask Bag	221	
Apron Plastic	20000	
Cable Ties	5894	

Please note, these numbers do not include PPE which has already been distributed from our equipment and distribution centres for use by our personnel.

In addition to the above, as at 17 February, Districts had 100 Rapid Antigen Tests each in their possession.

Please provide all information as to why there are supply constraints of N95 masks as noted on Pg.1 of the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Service Delivery COVID-19 Protection Framework dated 29 January 2022.

The above supply constraints were caused by two factors:

- On 25 January 2022 the Government announced that, from 4 February 2022, workers legally mandated to be vaccinated must also wear a medical-grade mask, for example type 2R or level 2 mask (or above), while working in public-facing roles. This saw affected organisations attempt to draw down supplies of N95 masks from MoH, causing strain on the national supply and distribution chain.
- Internally, our Regions and Districts sought to ensure compliance with this new requirement, causing a spike in internal demand for N95 masks and a subsequent strain on Fire and Emergency's nationally held stocks.

Fire and Emergency's revised protocol to only wear a N95/P2 mask for higher risk incident responses allowed our internal demand to stabilise. Fire and Emergency has subsequently received a consignment of N95 Aura masks from MoH. Fire and Emergency has also adjusted our monthly requirements on MoH as our internal demand patterns stabilised.

Please provide the evidence or public health advice that supports Fire and Emergency New Zealand's decision to use surgical masks instead of N95 (as previously outlined in the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Service Delivery COVID-19 Protection Framework dated 10 January 2022) for all emergencies other than medical emergencies or emergencies at managed isolation hotels. This includes all risk assessments or risk mitigation documents that support this decision.

This change in Fire and Emergency's protocol was made due to increased demand on our supplies for the N95 mask after the Government announced that all workers mandated to be vaccinated must wear either a Type IIR or a Level 2 mask or above—while working in public-facing roles. Fire and Emergency's revised protocol to use surgical masks for all incidents other than medical emergencies or emergencies at managed isolation hotels is based on MoH recommendations. Fire and Emergency has not undertaken separate risk assessments regarding this MoH recommendation and so this aspect of your request is declined under section 18(e) of the OIA. The relevant MoH recommendations can be found on their website: [COVID-19: Infection prevention and control recommendations for health and disability care workers | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

Please provide all information on how Fire and Emergency New Zealand is rectifying the N95 supply constraints.

As noted above, to help reduce pressure on our supply of N95 masks, Fire and Emergency clarified our protocols for mask wearing based on MoH recommendations. This allowed our internal demand to stabilise and allowed us to adjust the number of N95 masks we require from MoH.

In addition to this, Fire and Emergency has begun broadening our supply chains. To do this, Fire and Emergency has developed a Procurement Plan that allows us to source pandemic related PPE supplies, particularly N95/P2 masks, outside of the MoH supply chain. We have developed this to introduce resilience into our PPE (Pandemic) supply and distribution chains. The Procurement Plan allows us to seek additional stock when required, by approaching suppliers we already have commercial relationships with to satisfy the demand. This approach is in line with good operational and business practice and was developed under the Government Procurement Rules. The Procurement Plan has a life span of three years.

Any 'new specification' PPE product or product line (over and above that already approved by the MoH), must meet the correct international/national standards and Fire Emergency's requirements. We are working with other pandemic related PPE suppliers as the need arises, but our evaluation process and global supply chain issues mean sourcing new specification products can take some time.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Raewyn Bleakley
Deputy Chief Executive, Office of the Chief Executive

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