

1 November 2023

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Tēnā koe,

**Your Official Information Act request, ref: HNZ00031073**

Thank you for your request for information received on 9 October 2023, asking for the following which has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- 1. After mid-2022, how did you determine that the cause of death was definitely "FROM Covid-19", if "reporting [that] was based on an individual's death that occurred within 28 days of a positive case being uploaded" was no longer sufficient?*
- 2. How did you then determine that cause of death was Covid-19 "at a significant time lag after the event of death"?*
- 3. Firstly you say death 'with COVID-19' included categories Covid-19 as underlying Covid-19 as contributory*  
  
*Then you say that these two categories, either together or separately, are used to label 'Covid-19 attributed deaths' or 'deaths from Covid-19'. These statements seem to make deaths WITH Covid-19 effectively the same as deaths FROM Covid-19. How do you determine the difference between WITH and FROM Covid-19?*
- 4. What is the difference between "Covid-19 as underlying" and "Covid-19 as contributory"?*

For the sake of clarity, I will address each question in turn.

- 1. After mid-2022, how did you determine that the cause of death was definitely "FROM Covid-19", if "reporting [that] was based on an individual's death that occurred within 28 days of a positive case being uploaded" was no longer sufficient?*

Developing a '**deaths from COVID-19**' metric required substantial time and work. Cause of death is not usually coded by the Ministry Mortality Coding team immediately following a death – there is usually a lag of several years before a particular year's deaths are all coded. For COVID-19, this has been fast-tracked. The Analytics team responsible for the COVID-19 data send through a list of any newly recorded deaths that occurred within 28 days of a positive test to the Mortality Coding team every day, so that these deaths can be prioritised for coding.

The Mortality Coding team works with the Death Documents database, which stores Cause of Death certificates which are filled in by medical professionals. A specialised team of mortality coders then review these certificates and then determine whether COVID-19 was an underlying or contributory cause of death according to the World Health Organization's mortality coding rules for

selecting the underlying and contributory cause of death. One cause is always designated as the underlying cause of death and there can be many contributory causes of death.

2. *How did you then determine that cause of death was Covid-19 "at a significant time lag after the event of death"?*

The significant time lag mentioned in the initial reply to your questions related to the time it takes for all deaths to be classified by the Mortality Coding team rather than the time it takes for the underlying or contributory cause(s) of death to be ascertained.

3. *Firstly you say death 'with COVID-19' included categories Covid-19 as underlying.*

*Covid-19 as contributory*

*Then you say that these two categories, either together or separately, are used to label 'Covid-19 attributed deaths' or 'deaths from Covid-19'.*

*These statements seem to make deaths WITH Covid-19 effectively the same as deaths FROM Covid-19. How do you determine the difference between WITH and FROM Covid-19?*

COVID-19 deaths include all cases who died and were classified as an active case of COVID-19 at the time of death.

Deaths **from** COVID-19 relate **only** to those deaths where COVID-19 is the **contributory cause** or an **underlying cause**.

Deaths **with** COVID-19 relate to all deaths **from** COVID-19 described above as well as other deaths that occurred withing 28 days of a COVID-19 case being notified.

	Death From COVID-19	Death With COVID-19
COVID-19 Underlying	Yes	Yes
COVID-19 Contributory	Yes	Yes
Death within 28 days of positive COVID-19 test	No	Yes

4. *What is the difference between "Covid-19 as underlying" and "Covid-19 as contributory"?*

An **underlying cause of death** is defined as the disease or condition that initiated the train of events leading **directly** to death.

A **contributory cause of death** is any cause of death that is neither the immediate, intervening, originating antecedent nor underlying cause; hence there are other significant conditions that contributed to the fatal outcome, but were not related to the disease or condition directly causing death.

### How to get in touch

If you have any questions, you can contact us at [h.nzOIA@health.govt.nz](mailto:h.nzOIA@health.govt.nz).

If you are not happy with this response, you have the right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman. Information about how to do this is available at [Ombudsman New Zealand | Tari o te Kaitiaki Mana Tangata](#) or by phoning 0800 802 602.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public, Te Whatu Ora may proactively release a copy of this response on our website. All requester data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release.

Nāku iti noa, nā



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