



27 September 2021

[REDACTED]

Ref: OIA-2021/22-0197

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act request relating to a cost benefit analysis on mask requirements

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 1 September 2021. You requested:

"cost-benefit analysis (whether formal or implied) undertaken by or for officials, whether or not provided to ministers or their offices, in respect of advice on and recent Cabinet decisions (and new restrictions) regarding mask requirements."

Cabinet agreed to mandate face coverings on public transport and on all domestic air traffic services in Auckland in November 2020 and extended this requirement to apply the whole country (with some exemptions) at all Alert Levels in February 2021. On 16 August 2021, Cabinet agreed to further mandate face coverings in certain settings at Alert Level 2 and above. Further advice was then provided to the COVID-19 Ministerial Group on 18 August, specifically about mandating face coverings at Alert Level 4. A cost-benefit analysis was not undertaken for the proposals considered by Cabinet to mandate face coverings.

The justification for mandatory face coverings in certain high-risk settings was driven by public health advice about the efficacy of face coverings in preventing transmission of COVID-19. In particular, experimental and epidemiological data that supports the wearing of face coverings when there is evidence of infectious diseases, like COVID-19, spreading. The benefit of face coverings (when worn effectively while there is community transmission) is derived from the combination of source control and protection for the person wearing the face covering.

Where it is impractical to wear face coverings (including while eating and drinking) or where there are other mitigating factors in place (including measures like physical distancing and record keeping) face coverings are not required. The definition of face covering in clause 4 of the Public Health Response (Alert Level Requirements) Order (No 12) 2021 is intentionally broad to minimise the individual cost of compliance.

Noting the above, I am refusing your request under section 18(e) of the Act, which relates to the refusal of requests where the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response will be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Cheryl Barnes
Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Response