



Christine Massey <cmssyc@gmail.com>

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## Access to Info request to PHAC re alleged "new COVID-19 variant"

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Christine Massey <cmssyc@gmail.com>  
To: phac.atip-airp.aspc@canada.ca

Mon, Dec 21, 2020 at 9:57 PM

December 21, 2020

Cynthia Richardson  
Access to Information and Privacy Coordinator  
Access to Information and Privacy Division  
Holland Cross, Tower B  
7th Floor, Suite 700, Room 741  
1600 Scott Street, Address locator: 3107A  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9  
[phac.atip-airp.aspc@canada.ca](mailto:phac.atip-airp.aspc@canada.ca)

Dear Access to Information and Privacy Coordinator,

This is a formal request for records made under the *Access to Information Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. A-1)*.

Last week, the U.K. Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock stated that:

*"Over the last few days, thanks to our world class genomic capability in the UK, we have identified a new variant of coronavirus which may be associated with the faster spread in the southeast of England. Initial analysis suggests that this variant is growing faster than the existing variants. We've currently identified over a thousand cases of this variant, predominantly in the south of England, although cases have been identified in nearly 60 different local authority areas and numbers are increasing rapidly. Similar variants have been identified in other countries over the last few months. We've notified the World Health Organization about this new variant, and Public Health England is working hard to continue its expert analysis ... I must stress at this point that there is currently nothing at this point to suggest that this variant is more likely to cause serious disease and the latest clinical advice is that it's highly unlikely that this mutation would fail to respond to a vaccine but it shows we've got to be vigilant and follow the rules and everyone needs to take personal responsibility not to spread this virus."*

<https://twitter.com/talkRADIO/status/1338510584275460099>

On December 20, 2020 Minister of Health Patty Hajdu [tweeted](#):

*"This afternoon, @JustinTrudeau and I are meeting with our colleagues and officials from the Incident Response Group to discuss the genetic variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 identified in the United Kingdom."*

### Description of Requested Records:

All records in the possession, custody or control of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) that:

- describe the isolation of the [alleged] *genetic variant of the* [alleged] *virus that* [allegedly] *causes* [the alleged disease referred to as] *COVID-19* [allegedly] *identified in the United Kingdom*, directly from a sample taken from a diseased patient, where the patient sample was not first combined with any other source of genetic material (i.e. monkey kidney cells aka vero cells; fetal bovine serum).

Please note that I am using "isolation" in the every-day sense of the word: *the act of separating a thing(s) from everything else*. I am not requesting records where "isolation" refers instead to:

- the culturing of something, or
  - the performance of an amplification test (i.e. a PCR test), or
  - the sequencing of something.
- 
- describe the **discovery (not manufacture / fabrication / creation / assembly / alignment / trimming / mapping)** of the alleged genome for this alleged particular *new variant of coronavirus*;
  - describe how this alleged *new variant of coronavirus* relates to the alleged "SARS-COV-2";
  - include **any** additional analysis/investigation into this alleged "*new variant*".

Please note that my request is **not** limited to records that were authored by agents of PHAC, or to records that pertain to work done by agents of PHAC; it includes **any** sort of record, authored by anyone, anywhere, ever.

If any records match the above descriptions of requested records and are currently available to the public elsewhere, please provide enough information about each record so that I may identify and access each record with certainty (i.e. author; title; date; publisher); please provide URLs where possible.

**Format:**

URLs and/or pdf documents sent to me via email; I do not wish for anything to be shipped to me.

**Contact Information:**

Last name: Massey

First name: Christine

Address: 21 Keystone Avenue, Toronto ON M4C 1G9

Phone: 905-965-6254

Email: [cmssyc@gmail.com](mailto:cmssyc@gmail.com)

**Application Fee:**

I will submit a \$5 cheque by mail, payable to the Receiver General for Canada.

**Proof of Right:**

Please find a copy in the attached "BC" jpg file.

Thank you in advance and best wishes,  
Christine Massey, M.Sc.

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Our file: PHAC-A-2020-000393 / TTL

2021-06-23

Christine Massey  
21 Keystone Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4C 1G9

Dear Christine Massey:

This is in response to your request made under the *Access to Information Act* (the Act) for the following information:

**Description of Requested Records:**

**“All records in the possession, custody or control of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) that: · describe the isolation of the [alleged] genetic variant of the [alleged] virus that [allegedly] causes [the alleged disease referred to as] COVID-19 [allegedly] identified in the United Kingdom, directly from a sample taken from a diseased patient, where the patient sample was not first combined with any other source of genetic material (i.e. monkey kidney cells aka vero cells; fetal bovine serum). Please note that {I} am using "isolation" in the every-day sense of the word: the act of separating a thing(s) from everything else. {I} am not requesting records where "isolation" refers instead to:**

- the culturing of something, or
- the performance of an amplification test (i.e. a PCR test), or
- the sequencing of something.
- describe the discovery (not manufacture / fabrication / creation / assembly / alignment / trimming / mapping) of the alleged genome for this alleged particular new variant of coronavirus;
- describe how this alleged new variant of coronavirus relates to the alleged "SARS-COV-2";
- include any additional analysis/investigation into this alleged "new variant".

**Please note that my request is not limited to records that were authored by agents of PHAC, or to records that pertain to work done by agents of PHAC; it includes any sort of record, authored by anyone, anywhere, ever.**

**If any records match the above descriptions of requested records and are currently available to the public elsewhere, please provide enough information**

**about each record so that I may identify and access each record with certainty (i.e. author; title; date; publisher); please provide URLs where possible”.**

Having completed a thorough search, we regret to inform you that we were unable to locate any records responsive to your request.

Your request has resulted in a “No Records Exist”, because of the way that you have formulated your request. The isolation of the virus variant is not completed without the use of another medium, therefore we have no records that would show this process taking place. It is important to understand the following: The gold standard assay used to determine the presence of intact virus in patient samples is viral isolation in cell culture. With this assay, if virus is present in the patient sample, it will multiply and produce visible cytopathic effects, which means that infected cells demonstrate visible changes. Additionally, the detection of an increase in the genetic viral material by PCR further confirms that intact virus is present in the patient sample, since increasing viral genetic material necessitates replication of the viral within the cell culture. This technique was successfully used to confirm that intact SARS-COV-2 was present in Canadian patient samples. In the case of SARS-COV-2 isolation, Vero cells combined with minimal essential medium (MEM) were used because they are essential to support viral replication and cell growth. This combination supports the growth of other coronavirus types and was successful in the case of SARS-CoV-2 as well.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the processing of your request, please do not hesitate to contact Tammy Turpin-Loyer, the analyst responsible for this file by email at [tammy.turpin-loyer@canada.ca](mailto:tammy.turpin-loyer@canada.ca), with reference to our file number cited above.

Please be advised that you are entitled to complain to the Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada concerning the processing of your request within 60 days of the receipt of this notice. In the event you decide to avail yourself of this right, your notice of complaint can be made online at: <https://www.oic-ci.gc.ca/en/submitting-complaint> or by mail to:

Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada  
30 Victoria Street  
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 1H3

Yours sincerely,



Digitally signed by Burrows,  
Andrea  
DN: C=CA, O=GC, OU=HC-SC,  
CN="Burrows, Andrea"  
Date: 2021.06.23 08:11:16-04'00'

Andrea Burrows  
Access to Information and Privacy Division