



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

Animal and Plant Health Agency
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Our Ref: ATIC3133

[REDACTED]
{By Email}

6 July 2023

Dear [REDACTED]

PROVISION OF REQUESTED INFORMATION

Thank you for your request for information about scientific work which the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) received on 16 May 2023. Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000.

The information you requested, and the response following APHA's apology for the extension required, is detailed below:

"Do you hold any potential pandemic pathogens (PPPs) in any of your labs? If yes, what are they?"

Yes, APHA is a reference laboratory. A few PPP's can be found in the public domain on the links provided below.

<https://bwc-ecbm.unog.ch/confidence-building-measure-part-1/animal-and-plant-health-agency-apha-4>

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-03/mitigation-strategy-avian-influenza-wild-birds-england-and-wales.pdf>

The next one is from APHA's website and lists the pathogens for which APHA are a reference laboratory

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1088132/RefLabsDiagramJune22.pdf

"Are you working with any infectious agents under a Specified Animal Pathogens Order (SAPO)? If yes, what are they?"

Yes, APHA do work with infectious agents under SAPO.

APHA is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and also works on behalf of the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Food Standards Agency to safeguard animal and plant health for the benefit of people, the environment and the economy.

The information you require relates to the existence of infectious agents. Listing any current infectious agents APHA may currently be working on is being withheld under section 31 the prevention and detection of crime and section 24 safeguarding national security. In applying these exemptions, APHA have had to balance the public interest on withholding the information falling within the description specified in your request.

Section 31(1)(a) the prevention or detection of crime

Exemption 31(1)(a) covers information held by public authorities without any specific law enforcement responsibilities.

Public Interest Test

APHA have applied this exemption as the release could make APHA more vulnerable to crime. For example, the release of this information may lead to unauthorised access with the possible intention of pathogen release. The exemption is to protect APHA against theft and sabotage and secure any pathogens against misuse.

Section 24(1) – Safeguarding national security

Exemption 24(1) allows a public authority not to disclose information if considered that on release, the information would make the UK or its citizens more vulnerable to a national security threat.

Public Interest Test

It would not be in the interest of the UK's national security for APHA to list any infectious agents that may be being worked on under SAPO. Releasing this information would make the UK more vulnerable to a national security threat. In this case, information on infectious agents could lead to misuse. Therefore, APHA have concluded that in all the circumstances of the case, the information is being withheld.

“If applicable, what biosecurity level is used during work with PPPs and SAPO infectious agents?”

All work is undertaken at the appropriate containment level (CL)/Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP). CL2 for SAPO2/ACDP2, CL3 for SAPO3/ACDP3 and CL4 for SAPO4 work.

“Are you currently carrying out any gain of function work, or experiments to enhance the infectiousness or transmissibility of PPPs or SAPO infectious agents?”

APHA do not undertake any experiments to enhance transmissibility of any agents.

“Have you had any incidents of biosecurity lapses, leaks or safety breaches in the past five years? If so, can you list these?”

No, APHA has not had biosecurity lapses, leaks or safety breaches involving pathogens in the last five years. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) list a Register of Convictions and Notices on their website:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/enforce/convictions.htm>

Please refer here for any future enquiries.

Section 16 – Advice and Assistance

To assist you in your enquiries and clarify APHA's role within your request; APHA has a National and International Reference Laboratory for a wide range of animal diseases. In the event of a disease outbreak, as part of the Defra/APHA response, APHA is responsible for rapid emergency testing to support the eradication of the disease and resumption of international trade. APHA responds to a wide range of animal diseases including exotic and notifiable diseases.

Information disclosed in response to this FOI request is releasable to the public. In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOI and the government's Transparency Agenda, this letter and the information disclosed to you may be placed on GOV.UK, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. No information identifying you will be placed on the GOV.UK website.

An Annex is attached which explains the copyright that applies to the information being released to you and contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact the Access to Information Team at the email address below or postal address at the top of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ACCESS TO INFORMATION TEAM

Email: enquiries@apha.gov.uk

Annex

Copyright

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Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request, you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 11 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to the Access to Information Manager at the address at the top of this letter or email enquiries@apha.gov.uk and the team will arrange for an internal review of your case.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for a decision. Please note that generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted APHA's own complaints procedure. The ICO can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Please click [here](#) for further contact details.