

Mr Ian Kermodé  
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**Our ref: 2209885**

3 February 2022

Dear Mr Kermodé

We write further to your request which was received on 24 January 2022 and which states:

*"PCR and Lateral flow tests are used to detect/identify the Covid-19 virus. Please can you confirm the following:*

- 1. How does the PCR test distinguish Covid-19 from other coronaviruses such as seasonal flu and the common cold?*
  - 2. Is the PCR test able to distinguish between existing variants of Covid-19 such as the Delta and Omicron variants?*
  - 3. Is the PCR test able to identify new variants of Covid-19?*
  - 4. When does a variant of Covid-19 become something other than Covid-19 e.g. Covid-22?*
  - 5. Is the PCR test that is currently used to identify Covid-19 the same as that initially used in 2020 or has the test changed in any way?*
  - 6. PCR testing is carried out in a laboratory whereas Lateral flow testing is carried out by the user. In what ways do the 2 tests differ?*
  - 7. What is in the LFT device solution that triggers a positive result/how does the LFT identify Covid-19?*
  - 8. The PCR test can be adjusted by changing the number of cycles. Can the LFT be adjusted?*
- Thank you."*

**Our response:**

**Question 1: How does the PCR test distinguish Covid-19 from other coronaviruses such as seasonal flu and the common cold?**

Each of these illnesses are caused by different viruses. The PCR tests are designed to only give positive results if SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) is present.

**Question 2: Is the PCR test able to distinguish between existing variants of Covid-19 such as the Delta and Omicron variants?**

Yes, the IOM will retest positive Covid-19 cases using another PCR technique called genotyping to distinguish between variants.

**Question 3: Is the PCR test able to identify new variants of Covid-19?**

Yes, the IOM will retest positive Covid-19 cases using another PCR technique called genotyping to distinguish between variants.

**Question 4: When does a variant of Covid-19 become something other than Covid-19 e.g. Covid-22?**

The World Health Organisation 'names' new viruses. Please see their website: <https://www.who.int/our-work/science-division>

**Question 5: Is the PCR test that is currently used to identify Covid-19 the same as that initially used in 2020 or has the test changed in any way?**

The technique is broadly the same but Manx Care have constantly updated the test using different reagents, timings, equipment etc.

**Question 6: PCR testing is carried out in a laboratory whereas Lateral flow testing is carried out by the user. In what ways do the 2 tests differ?**

PCR is looking for the genetic material (RNA) of the virus whereas lateral flow tests look for surface proteins (antigens).

**Question 7: What is in the LFT device solution that triggers a positive result/how does the LFT identify Covid-19?**

Please refer to response above. The LFT has antibodies incorporated into the device that detect specific antigens.

**Question 8: The PCR test can be adjusted by changing the number of cycles. Can the LFT be adjusted?**

The LFT cannot be adjusted.

Please quote the reference number 2209885 in any future communications.

**Your right to request a review**

If you are unhappy with this response to your freedom of information request, you may ask us to carry out an internal review of the response, by completing a complaint form and submitting it electronically or by delivery/post.

An electronic version of our complaint form can be found by going to our website at <https://services.gov.im/freedom-of-information/Review> . If you would like a paper version of our complaint form to be sent to you by post, please contact me and I will be happy to arrange for this. Your review request should explain why you are dissatisfied with this response, and should be made as soon as practicable. We will respond as soon as the review has been concluded.

If you are not satisfied with the result of the review, you then have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner for a decision on;

1. Whether we have responded to your request for information in accordance with Part 2 of the Freedom of Information Act 2015; or
2. Whether we are justified in refusing to give you the information requested.

In response to an application for review, the Information Commissioner may, at any time, attempt to resolve a matter by negotiation, conciliation, mediation or another form of alternative dispute resolution and will have regard to any outcome of this in making any subsequent decision.

More detailed information on your right to a review can be found on the Information Commissioner's website at [www.inforights.im](http://www.inforights.im).

Should you have any queries concerning this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Further information about freedom of information requests can be found at [www.gov.im/foi](http://www.gov.im/foi).

I will now close your request as of this date.

Yours sincerely

  
Information Governance Manager