



**By email**

Our ref: 06/04/21/ld/47

19 May 2021

Dear Moosa Qureshi,

**Re: Internal review of Case ref: No. 2754 – UK pandemic/epidemic simulation exercises carried out with PHE participation between 2015 - 2019**

I refer to your email of 6 April 2021 requesting an internal review of the handling of case reference 2754, in relation to your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act").

***Your Request case ref: 2754***

Public Health England (PHE) received your information request on the 9 February 2021.

Under the Act PHE had until the 9 March 2021 to respond to your request.

***Response Case ref: 2754***

PHE sent you its response on the 9 March 2021 and correctly confirmed it holds the information you requested. PHE applied the Section 24 – *national security* and Section 21 - *information reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means* exemptions of the Act.

In the application of the Section 24 – *national security* exemption, PHE carried out a public interest test by setting out the factors it considered for and against disclosing the information you specified and advised it was of the opinion at the time the balancing exercise weighed in favour of non-disclosure of the information you requested.

As the Section 21 - *information reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means* exemption is an absolute exemption, PHE does not have to carry out a public interest test to determine whether or not it would be in the public interest for you to have the information.

## **Internal review decision**

PHE has now conducted the internal review and concludes that PHE sent you its response to your request for information within the statutory deadline.

I have addressed each point in the order raised in our original response.

***Please tell me how many UK pandemic / epidemic simulation exercises were carried out with Public Health England (PHE)'s participation between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2019 which modelled responses to outbreaks of infectious diseases at national or regional level.***

***For each exercise as defined in my first request, please tell me (a) the operational name of the exercise, (b) the infectious disease being modelled, (c) the month and year of the exercise, and (d) whether Public Health England holds a copy of the main report summarising the findings of the exercise.***

PHE can confirm that, upon further review, it considers that the Section 24 – *national security* exemption is no longer applicable to withholding the names and details of pandemic/epidemic simulation exercises carried out with PHE's participation, as specified in your initial request.

PHE can confirm that it is now able to provide you with this information. Please see this information provided in the attached document.

***Please send me copies of the main reports held by Public Health England which summarise the findings of... Exercise Typhon.***

PHE can confirm it correctly applied the Section 24 – *national security* exemption in withholding the Exercise Typhon report. PHE correctly set out the factors it considered for and against disclosing the information you specified. PHE correctly advised you in its response that having considered the factors for and against disclosure, it was of the opinion the balancing exercise weighed in favour of non-disclosure of the information you requested.

In response to your point that "*PHE's failure to disclose pandemic reports has catastrophically damaged our pandemic preparedness*", exercises such as Exercise Typhon and Exercise Cygnus are intended to explore and improve upon internal PHE and Government command and control procedures in the event of a pandemic or epidemic. Exercises of this nature are not designed to prepare the general public for a pandemic, nor are the reports intended for general publication.

***Please send me copies of the main reports held by Public Health England which summarise the findings of Exercise Cygnet.***

PHE can also confirm it correctly applied the Section 21 - *information reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means* exemption to your request for the Exercise Cygnet report. PHE can advise that the report on Exercise Cygnet was a

flash report only, and has been published in its entirety as an annex of the Exercise Cygnus report. For your convenience, I have provided the link to it here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-pandemic-preparedness/exercise-cygnus-report-accessible-report#annex-b--the-report-on-exercise-cygnus>

PHE would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused as a result of its omissions, and for its delayed response to your request for an internal review.

Please note that you have the right to an independent review by the Information Commissioner's Office if a complaint cannot be resolved through the PHE complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner's Office can be contacted by calling the ICO's helpline on 0303 123 1113, visiting the ICO's website at [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk) or writing to the ICO at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,

FOI Manager

## UK PANDEMIC / EPIDEMIC EXERCISES

The following table lists the UK pandemic/epidemic infectious disease exercises that were developed and delivered with Public Health England's participation between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2019.

EXERCISE	INFECTIOUS DISEASE	DATE	REPORT
Surge Capacity Exercise	Ebola	Mar 2015	Yes
Preparedness & Review Workshop	Ebola	May 2015	Yes
Exercise Alice	Middle East Respiratory syndrome (MERS)	Feb 2016	Yes
Exercise Northern Light	Ebola	May 2016	Yes
Exercise Cygnet	Pandemic Influenza (pre-exercise event)	Aug 2016	Yes*
Exercise Cygnus	Pandemic Influenza	Oct 2016	Yes
Exercise Typhon	Lassa	Feb 2017	Yes
PHE & APHA Workshop	Avian and Pandemic Influenza	Oct 2017	Yes
Exercise Broad St	Lassa and H7N9 Influenza	Jan 2018	Yes
Exercise Cerberus	Avian Influenza (also included radiation incident)	Feb 2018	Yes
Exercise Pica	Pandemic Influenza	Sept 2018	Yes

\*Exercise Cygnet – flash report only

For completeness, below is an additional table of other disease exercise that might be of interest.

EXERCISE	INFECTIOUS DISEASE	DATE	REPORT
Exercise Leopold	Ecoli O104	Sept 2016	Yes
Exercise Theodor	STEC Ecoli O104	Dec 2016	Yes
Exercise Helicoid III	Ecoli O104	Mar 2018	Yes
Exercise Optimus	Ecoli O104 (also cyber-attack)	July 2019	Yes
Exercise Horus	Ecoli O157	Oct 2019	Yes