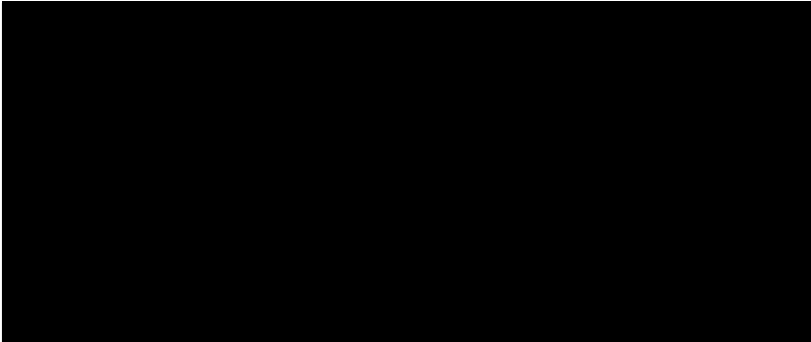


15 December 2020



I refer to your Official Information Request dated 29 October 2020 to the MoH and transferred in part from the MoH to Auckland DHB on 18 November 2020 requesting the following information:

Under section 12 of the Official Information Act 1982 I request all original communications including briefings, reports, memos, aides memoirs, cabinet papers and texts regarding the following information:

- 1. Specimen 154SUD831200 (WPQ 15413), including where the specimen was taken, the age of the person, whether the specimen was taken in the community or an isolation facility, which laboratory did the testing and why it took 30hrs from specimen reception to reporting, what time did the laboratory in question close on 10/8/2020 and start work on 11/8/2020, what time was the last coronavirus processing run on 10/8/2020 and how long does on average does each processing run take**
- 2. Specimen 20-61893914-NCV-0 (WPQ 15413), including where the specimen was taken, the age and gender of the person, whether the specimen was taken in the community or an isolation facility, which laboratory did the testing and why it took 20hrs from specimen taking to reporting, what time did the laboratory in question close on 10/8/2020 and start work on 11/8/2020, what time was the last coronavirus processing run on 10/8/2020 and how long on average does each processing run take**
- 3. Information around the lab specimen notified at 230pm on Tuesday Aug 11 (WPQ 15617 (2020)) including the lab ref, specimen receive date and time, first reported date and time, whether the test was undertaken in the community or an isolation facility, the age and gender of the person, and why the test reported at 230pm does not appear as "First Reported" at 230pm or earlier on 11/8/2020 in table 15413 (2020)**
- 4. Information around the index case in their 50s (Media Release 11/8/2020) and the swab that was done on 10/8/2020, which specimen this refers to in table 15413 (2020), where the specimen was taken, the age and gender of the person, whether the specimen was taken in the community or an isolation facility, which laboratory did the testing, what time did the laboratory in question close on 10/8/2020 and start work on 11/8/2020, what time was the**

last coronavirus processing run on 10/8/2020, how long on average does each processing run take.

5. **Is the index case in their 50s (Media Release 11/8/2020) the same person who attended Otahuhu Health Centre on Aug 6 and Aug 10, 2020?**

I am responding on behalf of the Northern Region Health Coordination Centre (NRHCC), the COVID-19 response team set up by the Northland, Waitematā, Auckland, and Counties Manukau DHBs. The NRHCC coordinates COVID-19 testing in metropolitan Auckland, including swabbing for COVID-19 and analysis of the resulting specimens at four laboratories in the city.

Responses to your questions are below, noting that we have withheld some details under section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act to protect the privacy of individuals.

1. **Specimen 154SUD831200 (WPQ 15413), including where the specimen was taken, the age of the person, whether the specimen was taken in the community or an isolation facility, which laboratory did the testing and why it took 30hrs from specimen reception to reporting, what time did the laboratory in question close on 10/8/2020 and start work on 11/8/2020, what time was the last coronavirus processing run on 10/8/2020 and how long does on average does each processing run take**

An overview of the testing process is below.

Swabs and testing forms are collected every day by courier from community testing centres, GPs and urgent care clinics and managed isolation and quarantine facilities and delivered to four labs across the region (North Shore, Auckland, Middlemore and Labtests) for processing.

People getting tested are advised their results can be expected in 1-3 days. They are also provided with advice on what to do while waiting for their result, such as whether they need to self-isolate.

Our laboratories have the capacity to process around 4000 COVID-19 swabs per day and manage surges up to 12,000 per day, and since February 2020 have processed more than 706,000 tests.

Their standard operating hours are 0700 to 2300 hours. As part of the Northern Region DHBs' COVID-19 response 12 additional scientists and 10 technicians have been recruited and many more cross trained in molecular techniques and specimen registration to be deployed in periods of surge test demand. During a surge in demand, we operate a night shift as well as day shifts to increase capacity. We also provide a 24/7 service for testing that requires an urgent response through a lower capacity platform.

Samples are opened by a Medical Laboratory Scientist inside a biological safety cabinet and are put through a process including heat treatment to deactivate any active virus that may be present prior to testing; this is routine practice for molecular testing of specimens containing infectious pathogens.

The samples then go in batches into an extraction instrument to get the viral genetic material out of the human cells.

Once the RNA is extracted the samples are then put into another machine that amplifies any RNA present specific to that infectious pathogen. A reagent, a substance used to create a chemical reaction, detects the amplified viral RNA and provides an indication of the amount of virus present in the specimen. There is a pre-determined threshold for reporting a specimen as positive or negative.

Every result is then individually checked by a Medical Laboratory Scientist to make sure there are no false positives, and any suspicious results are retested. False positive results can occur if there is non-specific binding of the indicator reagent; this is a very uncommon occurrence and additional testing on the sample will be carried out before the result is reported.

'Weak positive' results can occur when residual COVID-19 virus RNA is detected. These may indicate a historical infection. International research indicates people with these weak positive results are not infectious and do not pose a risk to others.

People are usually notified of their test results within one to three days. However, testing of contacts of cases are prioritised to support contact tracing and samples can be run on a lower capacity, rapid analyser for faster reporting.

If someone tests positive for COVID-19, they will receive a call from a medical officer of health who will advise them on next steps.

If someone tests negative for COVID-19 they receive an automated text message letting them know the negative result. The clinician who has ordered the test is also notified.

From the time a sample is registered at one of our laboratories to the result being notified to the patient typically takes around 24 hours. The total time from the swab being taken to the result being notified varies as it is dependent on the time involved in transporting the swab to the laboratory.

The laboratory that tested this sample is LabPlus. The hours of operating at this time were 0700 to 2300 Monday to Sunday. The specimen was receipted into the laboratory at 1651 hours, registered for testing at 1947 hours on 10th August and the result was reported at 2035 hours on 11th August; just under 25 hours after registration. In the late afternoon there are multiple deliveries of clinical specimens from all over Auckland arriving at LabPlus; it takes time for each specimen to be checked for specimen labelling errors and data integrity issues before they can be registered for testing. This explains why it took close to 4 hours from receipt in LabPlus until registration of the specimen.

We have withheld some details under section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act to protect the privacy of individuals.

2. **Specimen 20-61893914-NCV-0 (WPQ 15413), including where the specimen was taken, the age and gender of the person, whether the specimen was taken in the community or an isolation facility, which laboratory did the testing and why it took 20hrs from specimen taking to reporting, what time did the laboratory in question close on 10/8/2020 and start work on 11/8/2020, what time was the last coronavirus processing run on 10/8/2020 and how long on average does each processing run take**

Please see the response to question 1 for a general overview of laboratory processes.

The specimen number you have provided could not be found in the system, however we believe the specimen number you are referring to is 20-6183914.

The laboratory that tested this sample is LabTests. Its opening hours at this time were 0700 to 2300 Monday to Sunday. 20 hours is not an unusual time between specimen receipt in the laboratory and reporting.

We have withheld some details under section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act to protect the privacy of individuals.

3. **Information around the lab specimen notified at 230pm on Tuesday Aug 11 (WPQ 15617 (2020)) including the lab ref, specimen receive date and time, first reported date and time, whether the test was undertaken in the community or an isolation facility, the age and gender of the person, and why the test reported at 230pm does not appear as “First Reported” at 230pm or earlier on 11/8/2020 in table 15413 (2020)**

Please see the response to question 1 for a general overview of laboratory processes.

The test reported at 2.30pm does not appear as ‘first reported’ as the sample required additional testing. The time of completion of all the tests is what is recorded in the ‘first reported’ column.

We have withheld some details under section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act to protect the privacy of individuals.

4. **Information around the index case in their 50s (Media Release 11/8/2020) and the swab that was done on 10/8/2020, which specimen this refers to in table 15413 (2020), where the specimen was taken, the age and gender of the person, whether the specimen was taken in the community or an isolation facility, which laboratory did the testing, what time did the laboratory in question close on 10/8/2020 and start work on 11/8/2020, what time was the last coronavirus processing run on 10/8/2020, how long on average does each processing run take**

Please see the response to question 1 for a general overview of laboratory processes.

The laboratory that tested this sample is LabPlus. Its opening hours at this time were 0700 to 2300 Monday to Sunday.

We have withheld some details under section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act to protect the privacy of individuals.

5. Is the index case in their 50s (Media Release 11/8/2020) the same person who attended Otahuhu Health Centre on Aug 6 and Aug 10, 2020?

No, they are not the same person.

You are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the Auckland District Health Boards website.

Yours faithfully



Ailsa Claire, OBE
Chief Executive of Te Toka Tumai (Auckland District Health Board)

