

17 November 2021

Breakdown of CT Cycles

FOI Request

I would like a breakdown of the CT cycles and at what percentage that were used in your trust from the following dates separately:

27th December 2020 to 10th January? 25th January 2021 to the 15th May 2021? 7th June to 1st July?

Trust Response Previously Provided

Belfast Trust have not been able to answer your question as stated above as our laboratory staff felt this did not really make sense. However, they can advise that there are a number of different assays, kits and platforms currently in use for SARS- CoV2 testing. The numerous PCR based assays for SARS-CoV2 used by the Regional Virus Laboratory in Belfast Trust employ Taqman technology and the number of PCR cycles for this technology is generally 40 to 45 cycles - that is stated in manufacturer's instructions and is not altered by Belfast Trust's laboratory.

Clarification Request

To clarify question 1. I would like a breakdown of the CT cycles the PCR test was set at for testing on those dates. Here is an example of a previous FOI. I would like the data in that format, please. It is clear that the manufacturers have set at 40-45 ct cycles, however, the other trust has adjusted the Ct cycle on many occasions as you can see. So I've no reason to believe the Belfast trust has done the same.

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/731870/response/1748504/attach/html/2/FOI%20426%20McCann%20Response.pdf.html>

Trust Response Previously Provided

Belfast Trust has not been able to answer your question as stated above. As previously advised, there are a number of different assays, kits and platforms currently in use for SARS-CoV2 testing. The numerous PCR based assays for SARS-CoV2 used by the Regional Virus Laboratory in Belfast Trust employ Taqman technology and the number of PCR cycles for this technology is generally 40 to 45 cycles - that is stated in the manufacturer's instructions and is not altered by Belfast Trust's laboratory. We have not, and do not adjust the number of cycles that the SARS-COV-2 PCR assays are run.

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If this question is trying to determine what percentage of samples test positive at each CT value, this information is not available readily.

The Trust considers that the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit' as defined by the FOI Act under Section 12. Section 12 makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit. The limit has been specified as £450 for public authorities such as Belfast Trust. This represents the cost of one or more person spending 18 hours in determining whether we hold the information, locating, retrieving and extracting this information.

Further Clarification Requested

So the other trust I contacted was able to provide me with details showing that their trust altered the ct cycles from 10 all the way up to 45. And give me the percentages of exactly how much each ct cycle was used.

Are you claiming that the Belfast trust operated differently from that trust even though they are all part of the same department of health and NHS?

Can you provide evidence to back up that claim?

Trust Response

As the regional virology reference lab, we process at least 10 times the number of samples as the other Trust you requested this information from. No CT values have been altered. As stated previously, samples crossing the threshold at < ct 37 are reported as positive and between \geq ct 37 to <ct 40 results are reported as indeterminate and a repeat sample requested.

All Trusts meet regularly to ensure standardised SARS-COV-2 testing throughout NI. If this question is trying to determine what percentage of samples test positive at each CT value, this information is not available readily.

Belfast Trust regional virology lab uses many more Covid testing work streams, involving multiple platforms and kits – the service provided by a regional virology laboratory is high volume and complex. A retrieval of tens of thousands of results will provide quite useless data and the cost of retrieving the information would be above the 'Appropriate Limit' as defined by the FOI Act under Section 12.