

Victoria Obudulu

Head of Profession for Statistics,
UK Health Security Agency

Lucy Vickers

Head of Profession for Statistics,
Department for Health and Social Care

By Email

5 December 2023

UKHSA and DHSC request for exceptional pre-release access to ONS official statistics from the Winter Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study

Dear Victoria and Lucy,

Thank you for your letter of 5 December 2023 seeking exceptional pre-release access to ONS official statistics from the Winter Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study, England and Scotland, to inform timely decision-making by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to protect the public and reduce winter pressures on our health services in England and Scotland.

As you will be aware, when the then National Statistician announced an end to pre-release access to ONS statistics he said that 'should there be a need for exceptional pre-release access to particular individuals for a specific release, this would be fully transparent'. The overarching principle behind these arrangements is that we should work to ensure the integrity of our statistics but also recognise that in exceptional circumstances, the public benefit likely to result from limited pre-release access significantly outweighs the detriment to public trust in official statistics likely to result from such access.

On that basis ONS grants you exceptional pre-release access, as requested, for the purpose of ONS and UKHSA Winter Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study data to be fed directly and simultaneously into briefings to enable timely decision-making to help protect members of all communities from the impact of COVID-19 and reduce winter pressures on our health services in England and Scotland. To be specific:

- ONS will grant you pre-release access to the following statistics:
 - Winter Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study, England and Scotland
- These statistics will be published regularly from 7 December 2023 until 28 March 2024.
- ONS will make these statistics available to you up to 24 hours before the 9:30am public release.

We understand that you will limit the number of individuals who will have access to the statistics covered by this arrangement, and that you have already supplied the list of officials and their positions, who will have access.

- ONS will review these arrangements fortnightly to ensure they remain appropriate and proportionate to the need.

I trust that these arrangements will prove satisfactory, but if you have any further questions or concerns, please come back to me.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Rourke', written in a cursive style.

Emma Rourke

Deputy National Statistician for Health, Population, and Methods
Office for National Statistics