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By email

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**Request for exceptional pre-release access to the ONS statistics ‘Winter Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study, England and Scotland’**

DHSC and UKHSA are requesting up to 24-hour pre-release access, on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, to the upcoming ONS statistical releases: ‘Winter Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study, England and Scotland’.

*Rationale for this request:*

The impacts of a pandemic remain one of the highest risks on the national risk register, and actions to address Coronavirus (COVID-19) and other respiratory illnesses during the Winter season are a high priority for the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) and UKHSA have jointly launched the [Winter Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Infection Study](#) (Winter CIS) for England and Scotland. This study, funded by the UKHSA, started on 14 November 2023 and will run until March 2024. Both organisations are using the same underlying study data to develop different metrics, to be published simultaneously throughout the study period.

To demonstrate a coherent, whole-government approach to the important topic of COVID-19, each organisation’s publications and associated briefings should complement each other and fit together in a way that enables decision makers and the general public to understand the full story and draw the right conclusions with regards to the effects of the virus on the lives of individuals and the community.

Therefore, to enable a coherent and joined up approach, DHSC and UKHSA are requesting 24-hour pre-release access, on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, to the upcoming ONS statistical releases throughout the duration of this study: ‘Winter Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Study, England and Scotland’. These statistics will provide information on COVID-19 positivity rates, and symptoms and health outcomes associated with COVID-19 and other respiratory infections. We do, of course, wholly support the principles of equitable access for official statistics and we will review our requirement for pre-release access over this period.

If study findings indicate material changes in COVID-19 positivity and prevalence rates, it is of vital public interest for decision makers, including ministers, to determine appropriate public health advice and interventions at the earliest possible opportunity during the pre-release access window, and be able to publicly announce this advice or action at the same time as the statistics are released. Therefore, exceptional pre-release access to the ONS statistics will enable both the ONS and UKHSA outputs to be fed directly and simultaneously into the briefings and advice that are prepared, enabling timely ministerial decisions in the 24 hours before the statistics are published. This will help protect members of all communities from the impact of COVID-19 and reduce winter pressures on our health services in England.

Yours sincerely

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Head of Profession for Statistics, UK Health Security Agency

Lucy Vickers

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