

26th October 2023

BY EMAIL

Our Ref: FOI 2058

Dear 

Your request for information was received on 9th October 2023 and was dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Please be advised that the Business Services Organisation (BSO) has now completed its search for the information you requested in relation to email addresses of GP practices in Northern Ireland.

Please find the response below:

I can advise you that the contact details for GPs in Northern Ireland are available online:

<https://hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1816.htm>

In relation to the provision of GP email addresses, the BSO considers the release of this information to be exempt under Section 36(2) (c) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs'). When communicating with Practices, BSO typically uses emails that are not given out publicly so that the BSO can, for example, communicate patient safety issues.

Disclosure of this information (to an individual or into the wider public domain) would risk the effective conduct of public affairs, as by granting others access to this information, and therefore increasing email traffic to these addresses, may cause an important alert, or other safety related matters, to be missed by the GP Practice(s).

In conjunction with the above, the BSO considers that the disclosure of this information to the public domain would also be likely to endanger the physical or mental health of an individual or individuals and as such is further exempt under Section 38(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('Health & Safety').



In considering the above exemptions, and applying the Public Interest Test, the BSO considers that the public interest in withholding this information outweighs the public information in disclosure. A record of the public interest, including the qualified person's opinion, is attached for your reference.

I hope that the information provided assists you. If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter, as the BSO, along with all other public authorities are not obliged to accept internal review requests after this period has lapsed.

In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to

Information Governance Manager,
2 Franklin Street,
Belfast,
BT2 8DQ

If, following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision-making panel, you remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request, you may make a complaint under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the BSO has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act.

You can contact Information Commissioner at:

Website: www.ico.org.uk
Phone: 0303 123 1113
Email: casework@ico.org.uk
Post: Information Commissioner's Office
3rd Floor, 14 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB

In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. However, the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Yours Sincerely,



Karen Bailey
Chief Executive

Public Interest Test (PIT)

Disclosure of work email addresses of all GPs in Northern Ireland.

Exemption claimed in respect of Section 36 and Section 38 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs') and ('Health & Safety')

In favour of disclosure of information

- Public Interest and transparency

In favour of not disclosing information

- Disclosure of this information would be likely to risk the effective conduct of public duties, as by definition, allowing other communications (including spam and marketing emails) to use this information, which may cause an important alert or other safety related matters to be missed.
- Disclosure may result in service users obtaining email addresses of practices who have not previously released this information. Service users may use the email addresses, for example, to request appointments or disclose clinical details. GP Practices may not have procedures in place to regularly check email addresses if the practice manager is absent, and as such important clinical details may not be passed on to the relevant professional(s). Even if emails are regularly monitored, non-clinical staff may miss the clinical significance of emails from patients.