

## BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

This document reports a breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or the relevant Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders, to which the Code applies as if it included these orders.

### 1. Background information

Name of Statistical Output (including weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

NHS Immunisation Statistics, England 2014-15. Confidential until 9:30am Wednesday, 23 September 2015 at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/nhs-immunisation-statistics-england-2014-to-2015>

Name of Producer Organisation

Health and Social Care Information Centre

Name and contact details of the statistical Head of Profession (Lead Official in an Arm's Length Body) submitting this report, and date of report

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### 2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

- Protocol 2 - Release practices
  - Practice 7 – Subject to compliance with the rules and principles on pre-release access set out in legislation, limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operational purposes. Publish records of those who have access prior to release.
  - Practice 8 – Ensure that no indication of the substance of a statistical report is made public, or given to the media or any other party not recorded as eligible for access before publication. Report to the National Statistician immediately any accidental or wrongful release, and investigate the circumstances.

Date of occurrence

22<sup>nd</sup> September 2015

Nature of breach (including links with previous breaches, if any)

- The briefing co-ordinator at Public Health England (PHE) mistakenly issued 24-hour pre-release material to someone not on the approved list.
- The error happened when the forwarding the pre-release access email and the wrong contact was selected from Outlook's AutoComplete list.
- The mistake was noted immediately and the briefing co-ordinator contacted the HSCIC.
- The incorrect contact was a colleague within PHE itself rather than an external party.
- The materials were deleted unread from the incorrect recipient's Inbox and Deleted Items folders.

Reasons for breach

Human error occurred despite the instructions in the email, which clearly stated that the material must not be shared, circulated, published or otherwise discussed with anyone not on the approved list prior to the official publication date and time.

### **3. Reactions and impact (both within the producer body and outside)**

The recipient confirmed that the email and attachment were deleted unread. The pre-release materials were not seen by any unauthorised parties.

### **4. Corrective actions taken to prevent reoccurrence of such a breach (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)**

Ensure the Department of Health Head of Profession has been advised about the breach so that they can consider whether more emphasis is required in the Department about the importance of complying with the Code when handling pre-release access material.

This breach was discussed with the briefing co-ordinator at PHE and the following assurances were provided in order to prevent a similar breach occurring in the future:

- All staff in PHE will have regular training on confidentiality and this will include awareness of procedures to follow when sending emails which include confidential information;
- Following this breach all staff in the Immunisation Department have been reminded of the need to ensure that they check the email addresses of all recipients of confidential emails before they are sent;
- Specifically for the circulation of confidential reports and data for 24 hour pre-publication release, such as the NHS Immunisation Statistics publication, a draft

email will be created by the briefing co-ordinator using the email addresses of those specified in the approved PRA list.

- Prior to distribution of the PRA confidential information, the draft email recipients will be checked again against the approved PRA list

In addition to the above, HSCIC will reiterate their concerns when future pre-release access requests are received.