

# FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

May 3, 2018

**Mahalia Alpheus**  
**via the FOI website**

Dear Mahalia Alpheus,

regarding your Freedom of Information request titled “vagina” we collected the following information:

In mammals, the vagina is the fibromuscular, tubular part of the female genital tract extending, in humans, from the vulva to the cervix. The outer vaginal opening is normally partly covered by a membrane called the hymen. At the deep end, the cervix (neck of the uterus) bulges into the vagina. The vagina allows for sexual intercourse and childbirth, and channels menstrual flow (menses), which occurs as part of the monthly menstrual cycle. The vagina’s location and structure varies among species, and can vary in size. Female mammals usually have two external openings in the vulva, the urethral opening for the urinary tract and the vaginal opening for the genital tract. This is different from male mammals, who usually have a single urethral opening for both urination and reproduction. The vaginal opening is much larger than the nearby urethral opening, and both are protected by the labia in humans. In amphibians, birds, reptiles and monotremes, the cloaca is the single external opening for the gastrointestinal tract, the urinary, and reproductive tracts. To accommodate smoother penetration of the vagina during sexual intercourse or other sexual activity, vaginal moisture increases during sexual arousal in human females and also in other female mammals. This increase in moisture provides vaginal lubrication, which reduces friction. The texture of the vaginal walls creates friction for the penis during sexual intercourse and stimulates it toward ejaculation, enabling fertilization. Along with pleasure and bonding, women’s sexual behavior with others (which can include heterosexual or lesbian sexual activity) can result in sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the risk of which can be reduced by recommended safe sex practices. Other disorders may also affect the human vagina. The vagina and vulva have evoked strong reactions in societies throughout history, including negative perceptions and language, cultural taboos, and their use as symbols for female sexuality, spirituality, or regeneration of life. In common speech, the word vagina is often used to refer to the vulva or to the female genitals in general. By its dictionary and anatomical definitions, however, vagina refers exclusively to the specific internal structure, and understanding the distinction can improve knowledge of the female genitalia and aid in health care com-

munication.

Sincerely,

John Smith  
**FOI Manager**