



COVID 19: Body handling guidance

Purpose

This guidance is for fire and rescue (FRS) staff who undertake the role of moving deceased bodies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This guidance covers the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for the movement of the deceased. If a risk assessment indicates the possibility of COVID-19, appropriate PPE must be worn before entering the area, or having contact with the body.

Background

The NHS and mortuaries in England and Wales are experiencing unprecedented demand as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. FRS' are also managing the impact of any staff reductions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this unprecedented period where NHS and mortuary staff are impacted by COVID-19, and/or the level of demand for emergency response out strips their resources, FRS' will offer assistance in the form of the following:

- FRS staff will be utilised to collect and transfer the deceased from point of collection to point of delivery

Strategic Intent

To 'Delay' and 'Mitigate' the impact of COVID-19 across the UK in order to protect our communities. The National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) strategic intentions that are pertinent to assisting local authority mortuaries are:

- To proactively protect our communities and limit the spread of COVID-19
- To ensure the safety and wellbeing of our staff in the pursuance of their duties
- To ensure that the sector's response is coordinated and integrated with other responding agencies, and promotes shared situational awareness and joint understanding of risk.

Key Principles

There are a number of key principles that underpin the arrangement of FRS' assisting local authority mortuaries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The principles have been agreed at a national level between the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Fire & Rescue Services National Employers; the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Fire Officers Association (FOA) and Fire & Rescue Services Association.

This agreement has defined the activities for which FRS staff may be required to assist local authority mortuaries with as detailed below:

1. Ambulance Service Assistance; Ambulance Driving and Patient/Ambulance personnel support limited to current competence (Not additional FRS First or Co-responding) *
2. Vulnerable persons - delivery of essential items
3. COVID-19 – Mass Casualty. (Movement of bodies)

** This guidance document is specifically for point 3 only, 'Movement of bodies'*

It also stipulates that for the activities to be undertaken, the following minimum safety requirements must be met:

- The activity is risk-assessed
- Appropriate delivery and management of any additionally necessary training is in place
- Appropriate delivery and management of any additionally necessary fit for purpose PPE is in place
- Adequate management of the activity and firefighters is in place

Responsibilities of Employers

If asked, each FRS will select personnel who are suitably qualified to undertake the role.

Whether FRS staff undertake these duties within their own organisation or work under any secondment and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) arrangements, the FRS will work with the NHS and local authority mortuaries to ensure that the following minimum safety requirements are met for FRS personnel before they are operationally deployed:

- Appropriate delivery and management of any additional necessary training is in place.
- Appropriate delivery and management of any additional necessary fit for purpose PPE is in place.
- Adequate management of the activity for firefighters is in place.
- Familiarisation with local authority mortuary procedures that relate to body handling.
- Familiarisation with the risk assessments for activities fire service personnel will be expected to undertake and provide explanation of control measures contained within the risk assessments.
- Familiarisation and appropriate training on items of equipment that fire service personnel may utilise.
- Provide PPE in accordance with regulation and the most recent NFCC guidance '**COVID-19 – NFCC PPE Guidance**'.
- Ensure the health, safety and welfare of fire service personnel in the same manner as would be afforded to local authority mortuary personnel performing similar duties.

Role of FRS personnel

- Move the deceased from point of collection to point of delivery
- Assist with the processing of the deceased.
- Manage the decontamination of personnel if necessary

PPE

The health, safety and welfare of FRS staff is of the utmost importance and as such robust levels of PPE will be adopted for those assisting Local authority mortuaries and the NHS during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The levels of PPE will be aligned to published guidance - [‘COVID-19 – NFCC PPE Guidance’](#)

PPE – NFCC minimum requirements

PPE	Nitrile Gloves	Eye Pro	Fluid repellent Coverall suit or Fire Kit	Fluid repellent surgical mask	FFP3 respirator or equivalent
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

Additional considerations

The descriptors above detail the level of PPE that is recommended by the NFCC in relation to COVID-19. This follows the most recent Public Health England (PHE) guidance. This guidance should be adopted by FRS staff as a minimum for the care of all possible COVID-19 cases; a dynamic risk assessment should be carried out to determine if a higher level or additional PPE is required.

Although not recommended, should any FRS seek to reduce the level of protection provided, any deviation should be subject of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

The NFCC acknowledge that some FRS’ may wish to default to an alternative level of protection on occasion. Again, this should be subject to a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

Decontamination

As coronaviruses have a lipid envelope, a wide range of disinfectants are effective. PPE and good infection prevention and control precautions are effective at minimising risk but can never eliminate it.

If an alternative to disinfectant is used, the local Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPCT) should be consulted on to ensure that this is effective against enveloped viruses.

It is possible that these viruses can survive in the environment and so thorough environmental decontamination is vital.

Where less disposable means of PPE/Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) are utilised effective decontamination procedures should be adopted in line with current service procedures and extant guidance.

Training

Due to the rapid escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgency of activating MOU arrangements, the training criteria for FRS staff has been tailored to the activities in question. Minimum training requirements will include:

- Driver familiarisation with type of vehicles they are likely to drive

- Instruction and familiarisation on items carried on the type of vehicles they are likely to utilise in support of local authority mortuaries
- Training and familiarisation with appropriate PPE
- Introduction to key operational procedures. This should be tailored to reflect the level of training already received and experience of each seconded fire fighter.
- Provide information on shifts to be worked, work routines and welfare arrangements.

The timescales and locations of any training will remain flexible, based on the excessive demand currently placed upon each ambulance trust.

Welfare arrangements

It is recognised that undertaking the duties as described above are outside of the usual requirements for FRS staff. To ensure that the requisite levels of welfare support are provided, each service should ensure its respective stress management principles are adopted.

Working Time Regulations

In accordance with regulation 21 of the Working Time Regulations 1998, it is agreed that regulations 6(1), (2) and (7), 10(1), 11(1) and 12(1) do not apply during the secondment period as the secondment duties involve the need for continuity of service.