



COVID 19: Ambulance assistance guidance

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to fire and rescue services who are assisting ambulance trusts during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This guidance is specific to driving ambulance trust ambulances and patient/ambulance personnel support vehicles.

Background

Ambulance trusts across England and Wales are experiencing unprecedented demand as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact has seen an unparalleled increase in calls to control centres along with mobilisations to incidents. Fire and rescue services (FRS) are also managing the impact of any staff reductions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under normal circumstances, the impact of increased demand or loss of staff in the ambulance trusts would be managed via business continuity plans and mutual aid cross border arrangements. However, in these extraordinary times, and as demand exponentially increases, it is unlikely that the traditional models will be sustainable.

For operating business as usual, ambulance trusts require clinicians and emergency vehicle blue light drivers to operate ambulances to respond to emergency calls. During this pandemic where these staff are absent, or the level of demand for emergency response out strips ambulance trust resources, fire and rescue services will offer assistance to their respective ambulance trust in the form of the following:

- Provision of operational personnel to drive ambulances and patient/ambulance personnel support vehicles, limited to current competence. This does not relate to additional FRS first or co-responding.

Therefore, in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, fire and rescue services will offer assistance to their local ambulance service through the provision of operational firefighters who are emergency response driver qualified and hold appropriate medical qualifications.

Strategic Intent

To 'Delay' and 'Mitigate' the impact of COVID-19 across the UK to protect our communities.

The National Fire Chiefs Council's strategic intentions that are pertinent to assisting the ambulance service 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 ambulance trusts 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 and Fire & Rescue Services Association.

The agreement has defined the activities for which we may be required to assist Ambulance Services' 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 1 only, 'Ambulance Service Assistance'*

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 personal protective equipment (PPE) is provided
- appropriate management arrangements for Firefighters are in place

Responsibilities of Employers

Each FRS will select personnel who satisfy the minimum qualifications detailed in the 'skills and qualification' section of this guidance document.

Under any secondment and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) arrangements, the ambulance trust will be responsible for ensuring that the following minimum safety requirements are met for fire service personnel before they are operationally deployed:

- Appropriate delivery and management of any additionally necessary training is in place.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is provided.
- Adequate management of firefighters is in place.
- Familiarisation with relevant ambulance trust operational procedures, namely those covering emergency response and driving under emergency response conditions (blue light driving)
- Familiarisation with relevant risk assessments relating to activities fire service personnel are likely to undertake, and explanation of control measures contained within each risk assessment.
- Familiarisation and appropriate training on items of equipment and ambulance types 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 FRS personnel in the same manner as would be afforded to ambulance trust personnel performing similar duties.

Role of FRS personnel

Selected FRS personnel will fulfil a number of key roles to support ambulance trusts through this MOU agreement. FRS personnel will:

- Drive ambulance emergency response vehicles. This includes to respond to emergency calls for medical assistance under blue lights and the transfer of patients to hospital or other primary care locations utilising blue lights if directed by an ambulance clinician.
- Assist with patient care in line with their current competence level, as directed and supervised by the ambulance clinician. The ambulance clinician will manage all aspects of medical decision making.
- Only undertake other tasks at emergency calls under the direct supervision, guidance and instruction of the ambulance clinician. The responsibility for all patient records and safeguarding issues which are identified at the scene will lie with the ambulance clinician.

Management of Fire service personnel

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 the ambulance service during the COVID-19 pandemic. The levels of PPE should be aligned to recently published guidance - '[COVID-19 – NFCC PPE Guidance](#)' and PPE must be provided by the ambulance trusts for the duration of the secondment. The NFCC guidance for PPE is based on Public Health England's (PHE) guidance and that given to ambulance trusts. The levels of PPE required can be viewed in the NFCC guidance document.

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 they 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/RPE are utilised, effective decontamination procedures should be adopted in line with current service procedures and guidance.

Full details for the decontamination of PPE and ambulance vehicles following potential or confirmed COVID-19 incidents is outlined in the PHE guidance *for AMBULANCE TRUSTS* and the **COVID 19 – NFCC PPE GUIDANCE**:

[Public Health England \(PHE\) guidance for AMBULANCE TRUSTS](#)

[COVID 19 – NFCC PPE GUIDANCE](#)

Decontamination will be conducted in conjunction with, and under the guidance and supervision of, ambulance service staff.

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 emergency response vehicles they are likely to drive
- instruction and familiarisation on items carried on the type of emergency response vehicles they are likely to utilise in support of ambulance staff
- training and familiarisation with appropriate PPE
- introduction to key ambulance 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's recognised that undertaking the duties as described above are outside the usual requirements for FRS staff. To ensure that the requisite levels of welfare support are offered, 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.