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Circular: 2020HOC0386RLT

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To: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

ADVICE TO MEMBERS AND INFORMATION REQUEST: FIREFIGHTERS HAVE NOT BEEN EXEMPTED BY ANY GOVERNMENT IN THE UK FROM TEST AND TRACE STRATEGIES

Members will recall *all members circular 2020HOC0370MW* which brought members' attention to matters in respect of 'test and trace'.

<https://www.fbu.org.uk/circular/2020hoc0370mw/test-and-trace-initiatives>

As you will be aware, variations in the positions held amongst the different devolved administrations and the advice issued by different chief fire officers on the matter has caused a degree of confusion amongst members in relation to test, trace and isolate initiatives currently underway across the UK.

For the avoidance of doubt, there is no government in any part of the UK which has given an exemption for FRS employees from 'test, trace and isolate' strategies.

The FBU position is clear, we believe that firefighters should not be exempted and that this position should be maintained. Accordingly, all FRS personnel must cooperate and comply with contact tracers when asked and heed any notifications to self-isolate. This includes providing accurate information to contact tracers on any close contacts within the workplace as instructed. It is also clear that FRS employers should support all staff to do so as required.

It is disappointing that confusing information, which suggests that an exemption exists, has been provided from sources within the NFCC. It appears that this was circulated to fire and rescue service personnel, in many cases in good faith, by chief fire officers.

The NFCC position that was issued read:

Following yesterday's announcement in relation to track and trace a meeting has been held with the Home Office this morning.

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As a result the following three step approach should be adopted by Services when responding to the guidance:

- *Staff should state that if they had PPE on at the time of any confirmed contact, this needs to be relayed to the tracer immediately in order to avoid any unnecessary periods of self-isolation.*
- *Services should be clear that the app (when it is available) should be turned off when PPE is worn in the workplace to avoid false positives.*
- *The guidance should be followed on all other occasions.*

All other measures such as social distancing, good hygiene etc... remain extant.

Again, for the avoidance of doubt, across the UK the legitimate guidance makes no exception for firefighters such that they shouldn't follow the governments' guidance, irrespective of whether PPE has been or was being worn.

Similarly, the union is unaware of any expectation of governments that firefighters should turn off apps on mobile telephones, advice has been provided to members on these matters in circular 2020HOC0370MW mentioned above.

We are pleased to be able to inform members that following discussions the NFCC have clarified that their position is:

On contact from a tracer a fire service employee should inform them of their role.

If applicable the member of the fire service should inform them if they were wearing PPE when close contact occurred.

The tracer will then have their own process to follow.

Should an app be introduced into the process in the future further guidance will be sought, taking all factors into account.

Each of us will wish to ensure that we protect our own health and that of our colleagues, family and friends. As FBU firefighters we enjoy the trust of members of the wider public; are committed to safeguarding public safety and health; and accordingly have done all that we can to minimise the spread of this virus and to assist those who are afflicted by it.

Accordingly, we agree with the NFCC that all factors should be made known by firefighters to the tracers including details of the wearing of PPE. However, in order to ensure that the tracers are fully-informed, members are advised to ensure that they emphasise to the tracers that unlike many others, for example those working in hospitals and healthcare settings - firefighters do not wear PPE as a matter of course other than when attending calls or carrying out some external activities. Tracers need to fully understand that for most of the time whilst at work firefighters are not wearing PPE.

Members will be aware that the introduction of the test and trace strategies has also been beset by setbacks and other problems including, in some cases, tracers being poorly trained and prepared. With that in mind it is vital that the union is in possession of information from those members who have experienced test and tracing.

INFORMATION REQUEST

To assist in monitoring this situation, it is important that the union is furnished with the information on the ground. To make an accurate assessment we need to know what notifications are being given to FRS staff both when asked to identify close contacts after receiving a positive Covid-19 test result and when being identified as a close contact of a colleague who has.

We urge members to assist and we ask that those who are happy to share their personal experiences of any test, trace and isolate service, feedback any relevant information to your brigade secretary whilst anonymising any personal data. We are interested in what level of PPE members were wearing, if any, at the time of the identified close contact and what subsequent advice was given to them, both by the contact tracer and the employer. If members are happy to assist we ask you please provide the answers to the following questions and any additional information that you feel may be relevant. Information which is provided shall be used professionally and no individual member will be identified without his/her express permission.

In particular, members who have experienced a positive test result and/or have been contacted as part of a test and trace initiative are asked to provide information on the following:

- Were you contacted:
 - a) as an individual who had tested positive for Covid-19? Or
 - b) as an identified close contact of an individual who had tested positive for Covid-19?

If a:

- What information were you asked to provide regarding any close contacts in the workplace?
- What information were you asked to provide in relation to any PPE you or the close contact may have been wearing?

If b:

- What information were you asked to provide regarding the circumstances of the close contact?
- What information were you asked to provide in relation to any PPE you or the close contact may have been wearing?
- What subsequent instruction/advice was given to you by either/both the contact tracer and your employer?
- When did the event take place?

I thank members in advance for the assistance you are able to provide on this matter. The union is continuing to monitor the situation closely and will keep members informed of developments.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally



Riccardo la Torre
National Officer

RLT/sll