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TO: All Members

Dear Brother/Sister

Covid-19 – new strain

You will be aware from press reports that a new strain of Covid-19 has been detected in parts of the UK. Experts believe at this stage that it is concentrated mainly in the South East of England but cases are also being identified elsewhere. It also appears to be spreading rapidly.

The Chief Medical Officer for England has stated that the UK has alerted the World Health Organisation and that work is currently being undertaken to see whether or not the new strain causes a higher mortality rate or affects vaccines and treatments.

As new cases continue to rise at an alarming rate, medical experts are estimating the new variant of the virus to be 50-70% more contagious than the previous strain, which of course also still continues to spread at the same time. The Government is now urging that it is now more vital than ever that everyone continues to take action in their area to reduce transmission of this deadly virus.

The Fire and Rescue Service must play its part in this. We have had a worrying number of reports in the last few days of significant spikes in cases in FRS workplaces, taking firefighters, control staff and (in some cases) entire stations off of the run. In the worst cases reported the numbers of firefighters having to isolate are in the hundreds, due to the growing number of positive cases in FRS workplaces.

Covid-19 does not stop at the fire station door; we are not immune. Thankfully, for the most part we are seeing sensible approaches to protecting FRS staff and making workplaces as secure as is possible.

Through a national agreement the NJC has developed best practice risk assessments for all additional Covid-19 activities. These include strict control measures to protect FRS workplaces, and therefore staff and their households, whilst continuing to assist our communities through the most challenging stages of this pandemic. In the light of recent developments and the heightened risks involved, it is timely to remind ourselves of the importance of these safety measures.

It is also essential that every Fire and Rescue Service follows these essential safety measures, without exception. I am sure we all appreciate that to do otherwise would be utterly irresponsible.

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I urge all members with any concerns about Covid-19 safety in their workplace to contact their Branch and Brigade officials immediately. Brigade officials should ensure that all relevant safety measures are in place within all workplaces.

Firefighters have been on the frontline of this crisis from the start and we continue to be ready to do so. But we are not cannon fodder and will not be treated as such. It is not inevitable that the virus will transmit into FRS workplaces. Agreed procedures and control measures exist to remove and mitigate the dangers faced by FRS staff at this incredibly challenging time. The FBU will continue to use all of our resources to ensure they are implemented.

Health and safety is a right. Help us to ensure we protect ourselves and all our colleagues. That is essential to continuing to protect our communities.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

MW/sll