



Eich cyf/Your ref MW/sll
Ein cyf/Our ref HB/00202/20

Matt Wrack
General Secretary
Fire Brigades Union
Bradley House
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Surrey
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27 March 2020

Dear Matt,

Thank you for your letter of 20th March regarding the testing of fire and rescue service staff for COVID-19 (coronavirus) infection. Our Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) have also raised this matter with the Chief Executive of the NHS in Wales.

Maintaining continuity of our vital public services is essential during these exceptional times. That includes protecting key workers from contracting the virus as best we can. I note that the FBU has already called for Fire and Rescue Services to suspend non-essential public engagement. I support that, and agreed with our CFOs last week that public-facing fire safety and protection activities will cease, except for the most urgent cases where the risk of fire demonstrably outweighs the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

COVID-19 testing is also one of our main priorities and we are increasing the numbers being tested as quickly as we can. The Written Statement from Vaughan Gething, Minister for Health and Social Services on 21 March 2020 gives the latest position:
<https://gov.wales/written-statement-coronavirus-covid-19-update>

As you rightly point out, testing for health care workers involved in frontline clinical care must be central to any testing programme. Our immediate priority is thus to test those staff. As testing capacity increases, it will be extended to other emergency service staff and other priority groups. It is too early for me to comment on the procedures that we might apply once a vaccine is available, as these will depend on the speed with which a vaccine can be manufactured, distributed and administered.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
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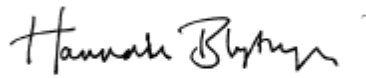
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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Please be assured that I and my officials are in close contact with the CFOs regarding their current staffing levels and the contingency plans that they have in place. This includes daily monitoring of absence levels and operational capability across all three of our Services. We will not hesitate to provide any and all support that we can if problems emerge.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Hannah Blythyn'.

Hannah Blythyn AC/AM

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government