



Strategic Intentions COVID-19: Non-emergency response activity

Issue: December 2021

Non-Emergency, Response Activity

Introduction

This document has been updated taking account of the rising tide of coronavirus infections from the latest variant; Omicron that is now circulating and spreading widely across communities. The latest government controls and guidance aimed at limiting the spread of the virus may continue to change and can be accessed from the government and devolved administrations official web pages.¹

FRS should be aware that there may be different levels of controls and guidance in place across the devolved administrations.

Following a meeting of Health officials from all nations of the UK, the COVID-19 level changed from level 3 to level 4 in December 2021. The restrictions and the introduction of national lockdowns, regional and local measures based on transmission rates has understandably resulted in different approaches being adopted to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

These measures have direct implications for each FRS and whilst the measures adopted in areas may be somewhat similar, it will be for each FRS to determine the extent to which the transmission rates and local restrictions in their area impacts on their non-emergency response work.

The framework is in accordance with the broad principles set out in the NFCC strategic intentions for prevention and protection activities, all of which are available on the NFCC website. There are clear and consistent links to the strategic intention for prevention and the advice and broad principles set out in that framework. In essence, an effective and consistent approach to eliminating and minimising risks is a core activity for all FRS staff and the exponential spread of the omicron variant of coronavirus brings this into sharp focus.

A key contributing factor in support of workforce resilience and safety as well as community safety is for as many people as possible to get vaccinated and where eligible, get a booster jab. This will support workforce resilience and the safety of people.

¹ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance and support - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-and-support)
[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance)
[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) | Topic | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/topics/healthandcare/coronavirus/covid-19)
[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) | nidirect](https://nidirect.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19)

Directing FRS resources to the booster and vaccination campaigns is a current government priority and vital role for the FRS in supporting this where it can be achieved.

Delivering non-emergency response services

This document provides a strategic framework setting out considerations for FRS to safely carry out non-emergency response activities which may have been disrupted due to COVID-19.

Its purpose is to ensure that the management of activities protects the safety of both staff and the public and does so in accordance with current government and local guidance and by way of common sector specific risk assessment. It compliments existing FRS activities and their associated risk assessments and decision-making processes; it does not supersede them.

Non- emergency Response: duties

It is for each FRS to consider a risk-based approach to undertaking non-emergency response activities, balancing the need to carry out our statutory duties and other work in support of Firefighter safety and to protect staff and the public from exposure to COVID-19. Non-emergency work may now also include responding to support the COVID-19 activities and drive to ensure vaccinations and boosters are administered.

The range of activities that this document relates to includes;

- Conducting Part 2, s.7 (2)d visits under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004; or equivalent in devolved administrations;
- Carrying out / refreshing Site Specific Risk Assessments (SSRI);
- Other duties of a non-emergency nature required in support of firefighter or public safety.
- Support to the NHS and Health agencies in delivering the COVID-19 vaccination and booster campaign.

It will be for each Fire and Rescue Service to determine, subject to their own local risk assessments, Local Outbreak Control Plan, Government, Public Health and NFCC guidance exactly what and how they will carry out non-emergency response work.

NOTE: Discharge Hospitals

Across some areas of the country hotels are being use as discharge hotels for patients from hospitals where the demand is high for hospital bed space. In essence, this results in a hotel being used as a temporary care facility for which it may not have been designed and to which additional hazards and risks may be present such as oxygen cylinders, medical and other devices as well as more vulnerable people.

FRS should ensure that they are aware of such premises and consider a review or create an SSRI plan for the premises as well as considering the PDA that may be required. Close liaison with the local FRS protection team is strongly advised and NFCC protection strategic intentions document has been updated to include the above.

A Risk based approach: non-emergency operational response

In order to continue to carry out non-emergency operational response activities, FRS should ensure that they can achieve this whilst minimising the risk to both Firefighters and other FRS staff as well as those in the communities. The lifting of or re-introduction of restrictions put in place due to COVID-19 may change a local services way of working and this should be factored into the application of this guidance.

The approach to response activity should take account of the specific risks of some specific types of premises such as care homes or intensive care units in hospital settings and similar types of premises where the risk of virus transmission to FRS staff and or potentially vulnerable occupants may be increased. This should always be balanced against the risks and dangers of not carrying out an activity.

FRS should endeavour to undertake their full range of activities but continue to adopt a risk based approach to ensure the benefits of such response to non-emergency activities will be balanced against the risk to staff and the public in terms of the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. The continued application of strong and effective infection, prevention and control (IPC) measures remain an essential aspect of minimising virus transmission.

The risk assessment of non-emergency response activities is based upon:

- Restricting the spread of COVID 19;
- Minimise staff and public risk to COVID 19;
- Demonstrate that non-emergency response activity risks outweighs the COVID-19 risk;
- Prioritising activities to support community and firefighter safety and leaning in to support the NHS and Health partners.

Continuing to work effectively

This document provides considerations for FRS to safely carry out operational, non-emergency response activities. Its purpose is to ensure that the management of activities protects the safety of both staff and the public and does so in accordance with current government and local guidance and by way of common sector specific risk assessment. It compliments existing FRS activities and their associated risk assessments; it does not supersede them.

It is clear that society and the FRS will be living and operating for some time to come with COVID-19 circulating in our communities. We should continue to evolve and adapt to enable our key services to be delivered and flex our response to support community and firefighter safety in the widest context.

Non-emergency response in areas covered by varying Covid-19, Levels²

The Government in England has introduced a set of criteria in relation to COVID-19 that can vary from local area to local area.

Across England, there are currently three COVID-19 Alert levels with each regional and local area placed within one of these levels, reflecting the rate of virus infection rates and a number of other factors.

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-levels-what-you-need-to-know>

For Devolved Administrations they will determine their own approach to rising infection rates although the broad principles set out here remain relevant.

Whilst Covid-19 alert levels are a factor that may affect non-emergency operational response considerations, there are other factors that FRS may wish to take into account in determining their position and as reflected in local FRS risk assessments.

Where a national lockdown is in force this will supersede any local tier or alert levels and the government regulations and guidance must be followed as and if they are implemented.

Baseline risk assessment and guidance in support of the Strategic Intention

The existing guidance for [Covid-19: guidance for first responders](#)³, [Working safely during coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#)⁴ as well as the range of [NFCC guidance documents](#) and risk assessment provide a good baseline of information to support local decision making and safe actions for FRS.

In considering non-emergency response activity that involves travelling to and entering premises, FRS should adhere to the latest guidance for first responders in terms of the appropriate PPE and infection prevention control measures as well as calling ahead and confirming with the premises responsible person or manager if;

- If anyone at the premises is showing symptoms of COVID-19 such as a high temperature (greater than 37.8°C) or a new, persistent dry cough;
- If anyone at the premises has been tested and is confirmed as COVID-19 within the previous 14 days;
- If anyone at the premises is known to have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 in the last 10 days;

If the answer is yes to any of the questions above, then local managers should consider if attendance is still warranted or if an adjusted approach can be employed that does not involve entering the premises. It should not automatically result in non-attendance especially if staff are vaccinated and apply a high level of infection protection control.

Work should be subject to the risk assessments in place within each local FRS, the appropriate level of PPE, effective IPC measures and in accordance with the advice and guidance set out by the National Institute for Health Protection, as a minimum (or as specified by Devolved Administrations health bodies) and mindful of other guidance and risk assessments available to FRS.

In all circumstances FRS staff should consider the Government advice relating to maintaining a safe distance for others, considering the use of face coverings as a minimum and good hand hygiene as well as ventilation of enclosed spaces.

Reducing Contact; minimising the risk of infection

Reducing contact between FRS staff or FRS staff and members of the public has the effect of reducing the opportunity for COVID to spread. Given the current omicron variant of covid-19,

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-interim-guidance-for-first-responders/interim-guidance-for-first-responders-and-others-in-close-contact-with-symptomatic-people-with-potential-2019-ncov>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

it is essential that potential transmission is minimised. There are measures that FRS can take to reduce contact, regardless of the situation:

- As far as possible make full use of digital technology;
- Use of telephone or email to make the initial contact, depending on urgency;
- Desktop assessments;
- Sending still images or video electronically;
- Use of video conferencing or similar live streaming;
- Electronic documents to replace letters;
- Enhanced website information;
- Reduction in staff numbers to carry out visits or other inspection activities (for operational crews);
- Reduction in time spent in high risk areas;
- Selection times for attending where there are fewer people in attendance.
- Discuss with premises managers prior to attendance what actions will be necessary to ensure social distancing and other infection control arrangements are achieved.
- Maintaining a high standard of infection prevention control measures.
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COVID-19 secure⁵ - Continuing non-emergency response activity

During periods of additional restrictions or heightened alert levels and whilst working within the rules and or with consideration of guidance, FRS should continue to carry out non-emergency response activity and visits particularly where sites present significant hazards to firefighters. This is a similar approach as with prevention and protection activities. This is in support of both firefighter and public safety.

In doing so consideration should be given to the recommended actions set out within the section on reducing contact: minimising the risk of infection on the previous page.

It should be noted that any premises that is legally open should be COVID-19 secure and have appropriate measures in place to protect people working and visiting the premises in accordance with any government rules. This should result in a safer workplace. However, it should be borne in mind that COVID-19 secure also includes the expected behaviours of those working or visiting the premises and complying with the arrangements in place to mitigate the risk of virus spread.

Whilst national lockdown remains as one of a suite of options for governments, where possible, it is anticipated that management of transmission of COVID-19 will be through government guidance and restrictions, Local Outbreak Control Plans, local measures. Fundamental to this is how people act and comply with good effective IPC and risk assessments.

It is expected that FRS will be engaged with other partners at local or regional levels to enact local outbreak plans which will allow a coordinated approach to how non-emergency response activity may be carried out safely.

⁵ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/index.htm>

The current and urgent need to accelerate the vaccination and booster jabs campaign is a key government priority to protect the NHS and support public safety. The FRS will be expected to lean in and offer any support it can to achieve this objective.

Additional Guidance

- [NFCC Strategic intentions & guidance COVID-19](#)
- [Guidance for First Responders](#)
- [NFCC Prevention COVID-19 Strategic Intention](#)
- [NFCC Protection COVID-19 Strategic Intention](#)
- [HM Government Coronavirus Main Hub Page](#)
- [HSE COVID-19 secure guidance](#)
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- **Devolved administrations guidance**
- [Coronavirus advice for Scotland](#)
- [COVID-19 Support for Wales](#)
- [COVID-19 in Northern Ireland](#)
- [Coronavirus guidance for Jersey](#)
- [COVID-19 support for Guernsey](#)
- [COVID-19 Updates in the Isle of Man](#)