

COVID-19

NAFD PURSUES POLICE OVER LIABILITY FOR ENFORCING COVID RESTRICTIONS

Following the decision, in late January, by Hertfordshire Police to fine an NAFD member firm £10,000 for breaching Coronavirus regulations, the NAFD moved quickly to address the understandable concern among funeral directors over where liability for enforcement of COVID restrictions lies and whether all funeral firms may be equally at risk - even if they have taken all reasonable steps to ensure COVID restrictions and limits are understood by families.

As this edition went to press, the NAFD was seeking further clarification as to whether we needed to update guidance on enforcing attendance at funerals, in light of this apparent additional risk.

The NAFD undertook the following urgent actions:

- In the immediate aftermath of the news breaking, we wrote to every Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner in England, asking them to urgently clarify their own position.
- We also wrote directly to Hertfordshire Police seeking clarification of their approach to policing attendance of funerals, as suggested in a radio interview undertaken by Superintendent Nick Caveney.
- We sought an urgent response from the Cabinet Office on their understanding of where liability lies and have highlighted this to colleagues in the Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG).
- We wrote to policing minister Kit Malthouse MP setting out our concerns and raised it at a

meeting of the All Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement.

- Chief Executive Jon Levett undertook radio interviews on BBC Radio 4 and on Hertfordshire local radio, disputing the decision taken by the police and highlighting the wider risks to the ability of funeral directors in carrying out their role.
- We highlighted our concerns to civil servants at the Ministry of Justice and Alex Chalk MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice.

Advice to NAFD members

If you aren't already following the NAFD guidance on enforcing funeral restrictions, we urge you to download it and ensure you are doing all you reasonably can to ensure client families understand the attendance restrictions. A copy was emailed to members on 26 January and you can also find it on nafdcovid19.org.uk.

We also circulated a template declaration for members to adapt and use, to accompany the guidance. This template (or something similar) will ensure you secure written confirmation from clients that they understand the restrictions. We know some members already do this, as it is recommended in our guidance, but others don't and we urge you all to take this extra step - particularly while we clarify the liability situation.

NAFD supports members in accessing priority vaccination and testing

Following extensive lobbying by the NAFD and others we were relieved to see that 'frontline

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funeral operatives and mortuary technicians/embalmers' included in the list of frontline healthcare staff (priority group 2) for whom occupational immunisation with the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended. This was detailed in the Public Health England (PHE) guidance - 'The Greenbook 14a, published on 31 December 2020.

Since then, the NAFD has been working closely with local resilience forums, local authorities, NHS providers, the Welsh Government and others to raise awareness and to assist as best we can with the roll out of the vaccination programme to frontline funeral sector workers.

We have also written to the Minister for Vaccine Deployment, Nadhim Zahawi MP, to update him on both the pressures faced by the funeral sector and the urgent need for swift access to both occupational vaccinations and testing for the sector.

A terrible milestone reached

On 26 January 2020, as marked by the cover of this month's edition, the UK marked the passing of a terrible milestone, with more than 100,000 people having now died within 28 days of an infection with COVID-19.

The NAFD marked the week with a series of interviews in regional and national media highlighting the work of funeral firms across the UK to support families during the pandemic and the challenges that the profession finds itself under.

Mental Health and Wellbeing support

Our Frontline is a collaboration of leading mental health organisations, which have come together to provide a single service to support the millions of key workers who are putting their mental health under pressure as they form 'our frontline' against COVID-19.

The partnership offers valuable mental health and bereavement support for NAFD members and client families.

Our Frontline comprises Samaritans, Mind, Shout 85258 and Hospice UK, supported by The Royal Foundation. It provides round-the-clock one-to-one support to frontline workers, including funeral service staff, who are part of the national response

to the coronavirus. The service offers mental health and bereavement support by call or text, and tailored online resources to suit the individual.

By combining their services, the partners in Our Frontline aim to offer practical, non-judgemental support with problems ranging from feeling overwhelmed or stressed through to coping with the bereavement of a colleague or family member. This support is important right now. But it will be equally critical in the months ahead, as the pandemic draws to a close, to make sure that the UK rebuilds and recovers the mental health of our frontline workers, alongside our economy and communities.

You can find out more at ourfrontline.org.