



The Netherlands, June 4, 2020

Dear police colleague from Germany, dear Stefan,

A house fire report came in on my radio. I was in the area and was the first to arrive at the scene. I saw several people on the second floor trying to extinguish the fire. I went inside immediately to instruct the people to leave the house and wait for the fire service. While going through the home to check all the rooms, I saw two people lying in bed.

They were the parents of the two boys. At first I thought: strange that they are lying in bed during the day. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. However, I soon understood why. They said: 'Don't come any further, because we both have coronavirus'. The man had been tested by the municipal health service and diagnosed as a corona patient. His wife had not been tested, but had the same symptoms. There I was, without any personal protective equipment. So I immediately went outside. I thought: I'm already infected - the only thing I can do is make sure the other first responders don't get infected as well. When the fire service arrived, I informed them immediately of the situation. They went into the house wearing oxygen masks. The fire itself was not so serious and was quickly extinguished. When other colleagues arrived at the scene, I also warned them not to go into the house.

I found the situation disturbing and was annoyed that the boys had not said anything. And also that nothing had been mentioned in the report. Afterwards, I found out that the report had been made to the fire service initially. At the time, their switchboard operators did not ask whether there were any corona patients in the home as a standard question. Our switchboard operators do ask this question. I believe that the fire service now also asks this question because of this incident.

When the fire had been put out, the fire service responders applied their corona protocol and started to disinfect all their gear. I was standing there looking on. What about me? Finally, at the request of the fire service duty officer, they included me in their protocols.

My shoes, hands, telephone and radio were disinfected. When I got back to the police station, the station housekeeper disinfected the car so that it was available for use again immediately. I took a shower and dropped my uniform off at the dry cleaners.



I may have contracted the virus in that house, but feel quite pragmatic about the incident. After all, I can also contract the virus when I go to the supermarket. I will only know after two weeks. The possible effect on me personally is the least of my worries. But I have a family with two small children and you can understand that I don't want to infect them.

Last weekend, I received a report of a drunken man in the city centre. As we drove to the scene, I and my partner discussed possible approaches. If we felt we had to arrest him, how would we prepare for that? When we left the car, we took protective equipment with us from our coronavirus kit: masks, safety glasses, gloves. Fortunately, we did not have to use them in the end, but the crisis has definitely changed the way we react to reports. These are strange times.

In general, I'm happy about the way the Dutch public is complying with the Covid-19 restrictions. One thing that strikes me though is that the longer the restrictions are in place, the more lax people become. I see people quickly returning to their normal habits. But they do listen when we talk to them about their behaviour and also correct each other.

It took a while for the police force here to issue clear instructions on how to act and provide the materials required for dealing with people infected with Covid-19 and resuscitations. Now that a few weeks have passed, you can see that everybody has got used to the protocols and that the materials are available. However, the materials that are available for your personal protection and for protecting the public are still sketchy.

I see a drop in all forms of crime except the drug problem. You see a lot of dealing on the streets and receive more reports involving drug nuisance.

Dear Stefan,

I would like to ask you three questions:

- How do the police organisation's internal decisions regarding how to handle Covid-19 restrictions affect you personally? For example changes to schedules, deployments (solo shifts, etc.), personal protective equipment, etc.
- How does the public react when the police enforce Covid-19 restrictions?
- How are you affected at a personal level when you have to deal with a possible Covid-19 infection, knowing that you might contract the virus and infect your family when you go home? How do you deal with this?

I look forward to reading the answers to my questions in your personal story as a German police officer.

Best wishes,

Thomas

National Police force in the Netherlands