



Tips for Law Enforcement Agencies to Protect Officers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

BACKGROUND

As COVID-19 continues to make its way through the country, non-essential businesses are being required to close and people are urged to remain in their homes for the foreseeable future. However, law enforcement agencies and officers are essential to the safety of our communities and must remain “open for business” and in regular contact with the public, often at the risk of their own health and safety.

INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies nationwide already have begun taking steps to protect officers, staff and the public from exposure to COVID-19 based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Where can agencies adjust to better protect staff and officers during this unique time in policing?

1. **CALL TRIAGE.** Agencies are taking steps to reduce the risk to officers during the call-triage process, including:
 - a. [The CDC has issued interim guidance for 911 centers](#) to modify their call-interrogation process. Law enforcement agencies can follow this guidance, as well, and develop additional screening questions for call-takers to determine the nature of the situation, enabling officers to identify the potential risk for COVID-19 exposure and coordinate the appropriate response. For example, with enough information dispatchers can request callers and others involved to exit the home or building in a non-emergency situation so that any field contact can occur outside.
 - b. Consider implementing a telephone-response unit (TRU), to reduce field response and to handle non-emergency calls pertaining to auto burglary, auto theft, larceny, indecent exposure, and fraud/forgery, among other non-violent crimes.
2. **INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION.** Working closely with other agencies—including the local health department, fire/rescue, and emergency medical services (EMS)—to coordinate response and understand the steps being taken to protect personnel.
3. **REVISING ARREST AND CUSTODY PROCEDURES.** The personal contact required to conduct an arrest puts law enforcement officers at increased risk for contracting COVID-19. During this time, some agencies have begun taking steps to revise the process used to place suspects under arrest, including placing a temporary hold on arrests of non-violent offenders. If an arrest needs to be made, however, agencies may make procedural adjustments that include:
 - a. Requiring officers to wear nitrile gloves during contact
 - b. Turning the suspect to face away from the officer during the arrest
 - c. Placing a mask on a suspect
 - d. Transferring suspects in vehicles with solid separation panels between front and back
 - e. Rotating and cleaning/sanitizing vehicles following arrest and transport

4. **SUPPORT STAFF EXPOSURE MITIGATION.** When possible, support staff is being given the ability to temporarily work from home. To protect staff who must be onsite, however, agencies can take the following steps in addition to following recommended [social distancing guidelines](#):
 - a. Working to physically separate staff who have regular public contact from those who can execute their duties in a controlled area
 - b. Implementing more frequent cleaning and sanitizing procedures for public areas
 - c. Establishing daily cleaning and sanitizing procedures for individual workstations
 - d. If available, offering personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff and other personnel
 - e. Supporting self-monitoring efforts and encouraging those staff members who are not feeling well to stay home, regardless of symptoms.

5. **OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION.** Beyond maintaining regular contact with adjacent agencies to coordinate response and safety measures, regular communications regarding efforts to limit exposure to COVID-19 can be sent to internal and external stakeholders including:
 - a. Agency staff, whether onsite or working from home
 - b. Officers
 - c. Communities
 - d. Elected officials
 - e. Local media, if necessary

6. **ENCOURAGING SELF-MONITORING.** Agencies also are encouraging officers to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of exposure to COVID-19. To support this, agencies are taking steps to:
 - a. Provide thermometers, as well as appropriate sanitizing materials for users, and requiring officers and staff to take and record their temperatures prior to entering the building
 - b. Loosen, or suspend, limits or regulations on sick-leave time and encourage officers and staff to stay home if they are not feeling well or begin to exhibit symptoms of COVID-19
 - c. Encourage those who may have been exposed to begin a self-quarantine to prevent additional spread
 - d. Maintain social-distancing guidelines as frequently as possible. Stagger shifts to prevent large groups from entering and exiting the building at the same time, separate groups of officers when possible—e.g., spreading out groups of recruits in the academy and in required firearms recertification classes.

The critical role law enforcement officers play in communities places their health and safety at increased risk of exposure during the COVID-19 crisis. While agencies cannot completely prevent the spread of the virus on their own, many already have taken steps to protect officers and staff so that they can continue serving and protecting their communities.

Additional resources for law enforcement regarding COVID-19 and limiting exposure are available from:

- [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
- [International Association of Chiefs of Police \(IACP\)](#)

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