



**COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Police, Sheriffs and Law Enforcement Officers  
March 26, 2020**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says that SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 disease) poses a low-risk to law enforcement officers performing daily routine activities. However, the risk level should be elevated to high due to the nature of police, sheriffs and other law enforcement work. Law enforcement officers are consistently encountering the public, handle arrestees during apprehension and transport people in vehicles. Several law enforcement officers nationwide have reported contracting COVID-19, including in New York City where over 100 officers are now confirmed to have the disease.<sup>1</sup>

**Stop the Spread**

Infected people can spread COVID-19 through their respiratory secretions. According to the CDC, spread from person-to-person is most likely among close contacts (about 6 feet).

Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, like how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It may be possible for a person to get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has SARS-CoV-2 on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the primary way the virus spreads.

People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (i.e., experiencing fever, cough or shortness of breath). Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms. There have been reports of this type of asymptomatic transmission, but this is also not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

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<sup>1</sup> NYPD's COVID-19 cases near 100, as hundreds more cops call out sick, New York Post, March 22, 2020. (Viewed on 03/25/2020) <https://bit.ly/2WOJNCG>.

## **Reporting Exposure, Protecting all Officers**

If a law enforcement officer thinks that they have been exposed to the virus, their agency should require the officer to stay home on paid leave if possible, and return to work when it will not create a risk of transmission to other staff.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, law enforcement agencies should:

- Require employees with COVID-19 symptoms (dry cough, fever, shortness of breath) to stay home or to telework if possible.
- Isolate and send officers home who come to work sick with symptoms.
- Require officers to report and document potential risk or exposure to their frontline supervisor and public health authorities. Officers should keep a copy of any reports related to an exposure.
- Require officers who are well but have a sick family member to stay at home.

Medical confidentiality and privacy must be maintained; however, limited information may be released if necessary, to protect other officers. For example, notice may be given that a fellow officer has tested positive without publicly identifying who tested positive.

## **Protect Yourself from Exposure\***

Due to the nature of the virus and how it spreads, this creates a unique scenario for law enforcement during apprehension and transportation and while arrestees are in detainment.

- If possible, maintain a distance of at least 6 feet.
- Law enforcement should also practice proper hand hygiene. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available and illicit drugs are NOT suspected to be present, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Have a trained Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) assess anyone you think might have COVID-19 and transport that person via an Emergency Medical Service (EMS) to a healthcare facility.
- Ensure only trained personnel wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) have contact with individuals who have or may have COVID-19.
- Learn your employer's plan for exposure control.
- Clean and disinfect duty belt and gear prior to reuse using a household cleaning spray or wipe that claims to kill viruses, according to the product label.

## **Reduce Contact with the Public\***

To reduce contact between people, law enforcement can:

- Equip 911 dispatchers to divert more calls-for-service to health resources when they do not require police response.

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<sup>2</sup> AFSCME Facts: New Leave Requirements Mandated by Congress for COVID-19, March 19,2020. (Viewed on 03/25/202) <https://bit.ly/2Ujucty>.

- Issue a temporary directive to release people on a citation, ticket or summons in lieu of taking them into custody, unless the person poses an immediate and identifiable risk to physical safety or is charged with a serious felony.
- Suspend standard protocols that place people in custody, for example by:
  - Suspending enforcement of bench warrants.
  - Limiting enforcement of arrest warrants to violent crimes.
  - Documenting, but declining to take into custody, people who have violated probation or parole if they do not pose an immediate and identifiable risk to physical safety.
- Limit their response to low-risk incidents in order to maintain capacity to respond to critical incidents and community health needs. For example, suspend enforcement of most traffic stops, noise complaints and minor quality-of-life complaints and the service of civil subpoenas.
- Limit the number of officers who have contact with visitors to the police department, preferably to one officer per shift and equip that officer with the PPE and training necessary to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Deploy or expand online reporting options for complaints or police reports. Encourage an expanded range of incident reporting by phone.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of all patrol cars, police precincts and station houses, with special attention to high-traffic areas.
- Create a written protocol and train all staff on how to respond to an active case of coronavirus. The protocol should include guidance on second-level reviews to determine if the person can be released instead of booked so that they can receive care and treatment in the community. If this is not possible, the protocol should outline how to safely transport someone to the hospital, communicate with specific hospitals closest to the precinct or station house and take steps to prevent law enforcement staff from exposure during and after transport.

### **Protect People Who Are at High Risk\***

When working with people who are 55 years and older or pregnant or have serious chronic medical conditions—law enforcement can:

- Use screening questions for anyone who is brought to or from a police station with the aim of identifying people with possible exposure or at higher risk of infection.
- Develop a written policy and training for law enforcement staff to separate people who are symptomatic from others, and to maximize the distance between people at higher risk of infection from people who may be infected but asymptomatic. The protocol should include guidance on how to work with other first responders to safely transport someone to the hospital, identify hospitals closest to the precinct or station house and outline steps to take during and after interactions with an infected person.
- Minimize contact between officers by suspending rollcall and using videoconferencing, e-mail and other technologies to provide briefings and advisories.

## **Personal Protective Equipment**

Employers must select PPE that will protect officers against SARS-CoV-2 and other hazards associated with chemicals to which they may be exposed during cleaning and decontamination of surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 (see below). Officers must wear PPE to help minimize exposure to the virus and chemicals through inhalation, contact or ingestion.

Examples of PPE that may be needed during cleaning and decontamination include:

- Nitrile gloves.
- Goggles or face shields.
- Fluid-resistant or fluid-impermeable gowns, coveralls and aprons.
- Dedicated work clothing and washable shoes with shoe or boot covers.
- Facemasks (e.g., surgical masks) that cover the nose and mouth. In some cases, additional respiratory protection (e.g., N95, powered air-purifying respirators or better) may be necessary to protect workers from exposure to SARS-CoV-2 or disinfectants.<sup>3</sup>

Law Enforcement Officers must receive training on and demonstrate an understanding of:

- When to use PPE.
- Which PPE is necessary.
- How to properly don, use and doff PPE in a manner to prevent self-contamination.
- How to properly dispose of or disinfect and maintain PPE.
- The limitations of PPE.

Any reusable PPE must be properly cleaned, decontaminated and maintained after and between uses. Facilities should have policies and procedures describing a recommended sequence for safely donning and doffing PPE.

Depending on the hazards posed by the size of a spill, degree of contamination or other factors, required PPE may be different than what is described in this fact sheet.

## **Cleaning and Disinfection**

Based on what is currently known about SARS-CoV-2, transmission of coronavirus occurs much more commonly through respiratory droplets than through contact with surfaces and objects. However, current evidence suggests that SARS-CoV-2 may remain viable for hours to days in aerosols and on surfaces made from a variety of materials (plastics, glass, metal, wood, cardboard, linen, etc.). Most transport vehicles and patrol cars are constructed primarily of plastic and metal surfaces. Workers tasked to disinfect surfaces should clean vehicles each time members of the public have been transported if they are suspected to be infected with the virus.

Employers are responsible for protecting workers tasked with cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated with SARS-CoV-2. Employers are also required to make sure workers are protected

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<sup>3</sup> Note: A face mask (also called a surgical mask, procedure mask or other similar terms) on a patient-inmate or other sick person should not be confused with PPE for a worker; the mask acts to contain potentially infectious respiratory secretions at the source (i.e., the person's nose and mouth).

from exposure to harmful levels of chemicals used for cleaning and disinfection.<sup>4</sup>

Law enforcement officers need an adequate supply of or access to EPA-registered hospital grade disinfectants for decontamination of police transport vehicles and their contents in their vehicles in the event an exposure occurs.

Law enforcement officers tasked with using biohazard cleaners in the decontamination process should demand that they be educated and trained and have practiced the process according to the manufacturer's recommendations or their agency's standard operating procedures.

### **Follow Applicable OSHA Standards**

- Employers must ensure that they comply with OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens standard (29 CFR 1910.1030) to protect workers who may be exposed to blood or other potentially infectious materials.
- OSHA's PPE standard (29 CFR 1910.132) provides additional information about selection and use of appropriate PPE, training and other requirements. Respirators are covered by OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard (29 CFR 1910.134).
- Employers must comply with OSHA's Hazard Communication standard (29 CFR 1910.1200) when their workers use certain chemicals for cleaning and decontamination.

\* The information found in the following subsections of this document was sourced from the Vera Institute of Justice: Protect Yourself from Exposure, Reduce Contact with the Public and Protect People Who Are at High Risk. (Viewed on 03/24/2020). <https://bit.ly/2WG0vEv>.

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<sup>4</sup> See AFSCME Health & Safety Factsheet, Cleaning and Decontamination of SARS-CoV-2 on Surfaces: Interim Guidance for Workers in Non-Healthcare Settings (March 18, 2020). <https://bit.ly/3d6Ov4y>.