

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

FAQs for Law Enforcement Agencies and Personnel

Updated April 27, 2020

What does CDC recommend for law enforcement personnel who have been in close contact (less than 6 feet) with a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19?

If law enforcement personnel have direct personal contact with an individual with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, they should immediately use alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol, or [wash hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. They should also avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth. Any uniform items (or other surfaces) that were potentially exposed should be disinfected or cleaned as soon as feasible. For example, the duty belt or other non-porous items can be disinfected using products that are [EPA-approved for use against the virus](#) [↗](#). Porous items, like the uniform, should be replaced as soon as possible and then laundered according to manufacturers' recommendations. This is especially important if any body fluids were expelled during the encounter (bloodborne pathogen protocols should also be followed if applicable). Gloves should be worn when touching potentially contaminated items or applying disinfectants and it is important to perform hand hygiene upon removing gloves or other PPE.

Law enforcement personnel who have an exposure should be evaluated by their occupational health program and may be able to finish their work shift before starting home isolation.

If personnel and resources are available, it is most protective for law enforcement personnel to [stay at home until 14 days](#) after exposure to an individual with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 if the exposure was prolonged (10 minutes or more) or if the exposure was of concern (e.g., the individual coughed into the face of the law enforcement officer). This would best protect the health of the exposed worker, their co-workers, and the general public.

However, if personnel and resources are not available, law enforcement personnel (considered critical infrastructure workers) may be permitted to work after exposure to ensure continuity of operations. To continue working, the exposed worker should remain symptom-free, and the employer should put into place the following [prevention strategies](#) for the exposed worker:

- Screen the worker for symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, or shortness of breath) before each work shift
- Regularly monitor the worker for symptoms, under the supervision of an occupational health program
- Ensure the worker practices social distancing (remaining at least 6 feet away from others)
- Ensure the worker wears a facemask (or cloth face covering if facemasks are unavailable) to protect others

If an exposed worker develops symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, or shortness of breath) and is still working, the employer should:

- Send the worker home immediately and encourage them to follow CDC guidance for [What to Do If You Are Sick](#).
- [Clean and disinfect](#) surfaces in their workspace.
- Follow CDC guidance to determine when the worker can [return to work](#).

For more information, see CDC's updated guidance for [Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#).

Are first responders being prioritized for those who will be tested for COVID-19?

At this time, first responders with [symptoms](#) are listed as high priority for getting tested for COVID-19 as part of CDC's [Criteria to Guide Evaluation and Laboratory Testing for COVID-19](#).

[CDC's Updated Guidance for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#)

Should law enforcement agencies screen personnel for signs and symptoms of COVID-19? —

Law enforcement agencies should encourage all personnel to self-monitor for symptoms before they come to work. Workers who have [symptoms](#) (fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and stay home. They can also enter their symptoms into the [CDC Self-Checker](#) to determine whether they need to seek medical care. Law enforcement agencies should ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with [public health guidance](#), and that employees are aware of and understand these policies.

How can law enforcement agencies get personal protective equipment (PPE) when they are in short supply? —

CDC is aware of shortages of PPE nationwide. Law enforcement leaders should contact their [local](#) [and state](#) public health departments and emergency preparedness partners to discuss options. CDC has developed [strategies for optimizing the supply of PPE](#), including N95 respirators, gowns, eye protection, and facemasks.

Are there additional precautions law enforcement personnel should take during death investigations? —

Upon entering a structure (home or place of business) where someone has died and COVID-19 is a suspected cause or contributing factor, law enforcement personnel should anticipate that others in that building could also be infected. If the cause of death is unknown, it would be most protective to assume that COVID-19 contributed. Law enforcement personnel should limit the number of personnel needed to enter the building, if feasible. If the building has not been cleared, law enforcement personnel should [wear the following PPE](#):

- A single pair of disposable examination **gloves**
- Disposable isolation **gown** or single use coveralls
- Fit-tested NIOSH approved **N95 respirator** or higher level of protection (or a facemask if respirators are unavailable)
- **Eye protection** (goggles or a disposable face shield).

Further, law enforcement personnel should try to maintain social distancing (at least 6 feet distance) with others at all times, especially while in the structure.

If the building has been cleared, then it may not be necessary to wear respiratory and eye protection, unless there are other hazards present that dictate their use according to an onsite hazard/risk assessment.

Law enforcement personnel should be careful not to touch potentially contaminated surfaces and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. However, this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Law enforcement should **avoid direct contact with someone who has died of suspected or confirmed COVID-19**:

- Every jurisdiction is different, but law enforcement personnel, in general, should not move or transport a body.
- Consult with the medical examiner/coroner's office to determine the appropriate next steps and protective measures for that jurisdiction. The medical examiner/coroner's office can decide who will transport the decedent.

When the investigation is over, law enforcement personnel should take the following steps:

- Safely remove gloves and other PPE and properly dispose of them according to existing policies and procedures. Law enforcement personnel should be trained on the proper [donning and doffing of PPE](#) [PDF](#) .
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or, if soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- If other reusable items (e.g., such as duty belt or gear) come into contact with individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, disinfect those items according to the manufacturers' instructions. For disinfection, most EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available [here](#) [link](#) .

If law enforcement takes a person into custody who exhibits symptoms of COVID-19, where should they take the person for intake processing (such as jail, hospital, or some other facility)? —

All persons taken into custody should be given a facemask or cloth face covering to wear as part of [universal source control](#). A facemask or cloth face covering may help protect others nearby if these people are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.

If a person taken into custody exhibits [signs and symptoms](#) of COVID-19 (cough, fever, or shortness of breath), the person should be assessed for transport to a healthcare facility for further evaluation and management. Medical evaluation during intake processing may be necessary, especially if COVID-19 is suspected. If, at any point, it is determined that the person taken into custody needs medical care, transportation should be coordinated with EMS providers and the receiving healthcare facility.

If a person taken into custody does not show any symptoms of COVID-19, he or she should still be isolated as much as feasible during intake processing.

[CDC has additional evidence for correctional and detention facilities that may be useful.](#)

Should law enforcement personnel and other first responders take additional precautions when coming home, even if they have no symptoms of COVID-19, to avoid potentially exposing household members?

CDC recommends that law enforcement personnel practice [everyday measures](#) to protect their household members from becoming ill. These measures include:

- hand hygiene
- covering coughs and sneezes
- disinfecting frequently touched surfaces daily

Many law enforcement personnel routinely change out of their uniforms at the station and wear street clothes and shoes home. Laundry services for uniforms may be provided by law enforcement agencies. Continuing this practice may help minimize the potential of transmitting the virus that causes COVID-19 and other potential take-home exposures. Law enforcement personnel should perform [hand hygiene](#) after changing out of uniforms.

They also should have a plan for household members who are at [higher risk for severe illness](#) from COVID-19.

Is there any specific guidance for protecting police canines from COVID-19 exposure?

We are still learning about the virus, but it appears that it can spread from people to animals in some situations. Therefore, CDC recommends that people sick with COVID-19 restrict contact with animals until more information is known about the virus.

- If a police canine that has been exposed to a person or setting with COVID-19 develops a new illness, contact your veterinary clinic and let them know that a working dog with a COVID-19 exposure has developed a new illness.
- Your veterinarian can evaluate your pet and determine the next steps for your pet's treatment and care. For more information, please see CDC's [If You Have Animals](#) guidance.
- Do not use products not approved for use on animals to try to clean a police canine's fur or paws.