

MONITOR & MITIGATE

The Impact of COVID-19 on Public Safety



The Risk of COVID-19 Exposure

Limiting Exposure on Service Delivery Calls

First responders are at risk while delivering service. With each patient encounter, first responders are susceptible to being exposed to COVID-19 positive patients. To reduce personnel losses, first responder organizations have implemented strategies to carry out service delivery calls as safely as possible.

Scout Medic

Upon arriving at non-critical calls, numerous departments have utilized a scout medic. This procedure involves:

- Deploying an individual first responder to approach the patient to make an initial assessment. Depending on the situation, the scout medic will either handle the patient alone or will request assistance from other first responders who are already onsite.
- If the patient is ambulatory, the scout medic will ask them to come outside to be treated.

“The scout medic has probably been the major factor in reducing exposures....I credit that with our low number of actual COVID cases”.

Fire Battalion Chief in a small urban department (Int. 0668)

Scout medics have been successfully employed in varying types of first responder organizations (e.g., fire, emergency medical), and with departments of varying sizes and geographic locations.

Keep in mind:

The impact on patient outcomes has not yet been rigorously assessed.

IN THIS BRIEF

- ▶ Exposure risk on calls
- ▶ How to limit exposure
- ▶ Other safety measures

RELEVANT FOR



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The goal of the project is to measure the impact of COVID-19 on first responders, identify and share best practices organizations can put in place to protect themselves in the short term, and identify strategies to make first responder organizations more resilient to pandemics in the future.

This brief is based on findings from initial interviews with 29 first responders representing 29 distinct departments across 16 states.



Resource Referrals

For project news and updates:

- Visit start.umd.edu/COVIDFirstResponders & second sight-ts.com/covid19-topic-dashboard
- Subscribe to START's newsletter at start.umd.edu/newsletters
- Follow us on social media with #COVIDFirstResponders

Dispatch Center

Departments have relied on dispatch centers to help navigate patient encounters. The dispatch center can rely on a number of COVID-19 related questions to determine whether the patient is likely to be positive. This allows first responders to appropriately tailor their COVID-19 precautions. EMS, fire, and law enforcement departments of various sizes in urban and rural areas all around the country have relied on their dispatch centers as a first line of defense against COVID-19.

New PPE and Decon Procedures

Many first responder agencies have begun treating every patient encounter as if it is a positive case. This demands full PPE on each service delivery call. While what constitutes full PPE varies between departments, it overwhelmingly requires N95 masks and gloves, and can also involve face shields, gowns, PAPRs, CAPRs, SCBAs, and more. While this entails a great deal of PPE, it keeps first responders safe from positive patients. Moreover, many departments have mandated extensive decontamination procedures after each call, which often includes taking ambulances out of service until they can be completely sanitized.

“Every call we have, we spray it [the ambulance] down. Everybody has COVID.

Lieutenant in a small rural EMS department (Int. 1337)

Quick Tips: Other Ways to Limit Exposure

- 1 Reduce procedures to basic life support while in ambulances to decrease aerosolization of the virus.
- 2 Curtail community events and lock the doors to the public to limit community interaction and potential exposures.
- 3 Install additional safety equipment in ambulances, apparatuses, and patrol units used to transport members of the community.

“Our officer safety is paramount and we wanted to make sure we weren't putting them in a difficult situation.

Chief of Police in a small urban department (Int. 7339)



**HOW TO HELP
FIRST RESPONDERS**

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