



COVID-19: Health and Safety for Law Enforcement Families

Educate Yourself. Stay Informed. Be Safe.

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak presents unique challenges for law enforcement families. Healthy practices start at home and are vital in preventing officers and their families from catching the virus.

Understanding the Virus

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and now identified in more than 100 countries across the globe. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses found in people and animals causing a range of illnesses from the common cold to severe respiratory infection. COVID-19 is called a novel strain of coronavirus because it has never been identified in humans before. As it is a newly-identified virus, this is an emerging and rapidly-evolving situation and new information is becoming available daily.

- The most common symptoms include a dry cough, fever, and shortness of breath.¹ Less common symptoms may include nausea, fatigue, sore throat, chills, and nasal congestion.
- At-risk populations include older adults and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes.

Talking to Children about COVID-19

Children may experience fear and uncertainty about the virus. They may also have fears about their parents reporting for duty during the outbreak. Take time to have a conversation with your child and answer questions he/she may have. Having age-appropriate discussions about the risks and prevention/mitigation behaviors help to normalize behavior and not increase family anxiety. Consider the following when talking about COVID-19 with children²:

- Ask your child what he/she knows about COVID-19 and clarify any misinformation. Understand that children may hear rumors or misinformation from their friends, peers, news, television, or from social media.
- Re-assure your child that the risk for younger age groups without pre-existing medical conditions is relatively low³ and that of those people who do contract the virus, most experience only mild symptoms and recover at home from the infection.⁴
- Adapt your language to your child's comprehension level. When talking about COVID-19, consider the child's maturity and ability to understand what you're saying.
- Understand that fear and unease may be expressed in different ways by children.

- Explain that routines and schedules may temporarily change and why that may happen.
- Explain how the virus spreads and how germs can easily move from person to person and even from surface to surface.

Explaining Basic Hygiene Practices to Children

- Practice proper hygiene together.
- Teach your child to wash his/her hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Encourage younger child to sing their ABCs if they struggle to count to twenty. Challenge older children to come up with a song to sing for at least 20 seconds while they wash their hands.
- Encourage good hygiene, such as promptly washing or sanitizing hands after coughing, sneezing, or physically interacting with others.
- Point out when your child is touching his/her face and gently discourage poor habits that could contribute to the transmission of the virus. Make this a fun challenge with children to avoid causing stress or fear about "getting caught" but rather frame it as a family game to increase the practice of good hygiene.

How Agencies Can Support Law Enforcement Families

Family members of law enforcement officers reporting for duty may experience fear and distress that their officer may be exposed to the virus because of their profession. Family members may also be distressed at having their officer away from home for prolonged periods of time. Agencies can be proactive in communication to ease these fears and ensure officers have a strong support system to return home to.

- Establish a clear path of regular and frequent communication to law enforcement families, such as an email list, dedicated social media account, or online group.
- Share proactive steps and safety protocols being taken to ensure the health and well-being of officers and their families, including information on healthcare, mental wellness, and/or Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).
- Engage with family or spousal support groups to disseminate official agency messaging to family members.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html>
² https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>
⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/faq.html>



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Officers at Home

Officers are exposed to numerous individuals and environments while on duty. Before returning home, officers should:

- Sanitize duty belts and any equipment that's frequently touched.
- Change out of uniform at the end of a shift while still at the station or immediately after returning home prior to interacting with family members.
- Visually practice good hygiene upon entering the home so children see parents washing hands, changing clothes, etc. to model good behavior. Reinforce it as routine to help minimize children's anxiety.

Illness at Home

Officers should also create a family emergency plan to include collecting key phone numbers, stocking up on necessary medications and supplies, charging up equipment, etc. Get regular up-to-date information about local COVID-19 activity from public health officials in your community. Remember to consider members of your household that may be at greater risk such as older adults and people with severe chronic illnesses.⁵

If you or a family member has been exposed to COVID-19 and develops a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or difficulty breathing,⁶ take the following actions:

- Call your healthcare provider immediately.
- Stay home except to get medical care.
- Isolate in a room from the rest of family members (including pets). To limit anxiety in children, reinforce that this is a normal thing to do to keep the rest of the family healthy as part of basic disease isolation, similar what families already practice for the flu, cold, etc.
- Make sure to follow your agency's protocols relating to sick leave.

Remaining at home during sickness will prevent the virus from spreading to community members.

Contact

Social Media

Support Groups

Agency Points of Contact for Families (healthcare, mental wellness, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP))

5 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/checklist-household-ready.html>

6 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>