



**2020 - 2021**  
**FIRE SAFETY BOOK**  
*Because We Care*





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# What Firefighters and EMS Providers Need to Know about COVID-19

Updated Nov. 6, 2020

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms often include cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell. Our understanding of how the virus spreads is evolving as we learn more about it, so check the CDC website for the latest information. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet)
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks

Recent studies indicate that the virus can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. This is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, but we are still learning more about this virus. Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19.

## ***As a firefighter or EMS worker providing medical treatment and transport of ill patients, how can I protect myself and others?***

- Do not work if you are sick. If you develop a fever or symptoms such as cough or shortness of breath, call your healthcare provider for medical advice and guidance before visiting their office. Follow your department's return-to-work policy after recovering from the illness.
- Contact your supervisor and occupational health program immediately if you are exposed to a patient with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 when you are not wearing recommended personal protective equipment (PPE). Complete any occupational exposure report forms required by your organization.
  - If you are permitted to continue working, take additional precautions, including wearing a face-mask and monitoring for symptoms and fever for 14 days after you were exposed to the patient.
- Wear the following PPE for all patient interactions where COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed:



- Fit tested NIOSH-approved N95 or higher level respirator, or a face-mask if a respirator is not available
- N95 respirators or respirators that offer a higher level of protection should be used instead of a face-mask when you are performing or present for an aerosol-generating procedure.
- If you use a respirator, you must be clean-shaven because facial hair can cause respirators to leak around the face seal.
- A single pair of disposable examination gloves
- Eye protection, such as face shield or goggles, unless you are wearing a full-face respirator
- Gown or coveralls
- If your PPE becomes grossly contaminated or compromised (e.g., torn), discard and replace your PPE in accordance with the policies and procedures of your organization.
- Follow [CDC guidance](#) if you are reusing, reprocessing, and storing PPE.
- Have patients wear face-masks or cloth face coverings for source control, if they can tolerate it.
- Limit the number of providers in the patient compartment to minimize possible exposures.
- [Use EPA-registered hospital-grade disinfectants](#) to disinfect non-porous surfaces of ambulances, gurneys, clipboards, radios, and other frequently touched surfaces or equipment according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Non-porous surfaces of PPE such as powered air-purifying respirators (PAPRs) should be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendation.
- Launder reusable personal protective clothing (e.g., uniforms) or other porous materials according to the manufacturer's recommendations if they become contaminated.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers with greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol, or wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds when soap and water are available. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

## ***What steps should employers of firefighter and EMS personnel take?***

- Develop and share a COVID-19 health and safety plan to protect firefighter and EMS employees.
- Deliver up-to-date safety messaging on the current status of resources and protocols.
- Use National Incident Management System (NIMS) forms to document pro-



protective actions.

- Actively encourage sick employees to stay home. Employees should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met, in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments. Sick leave policies should be flexible and non-punitive.
- Fit test personnel for appropriate respirators. Train them on proper donning, doffing, and maintenance of all PPE. All PPE should be accessible to responders when needed and available.
- Implement a specific protocol with dispatch centers to determine if a caller or patient may have signs or symptoms and risk factors for COVID-19, and communicate that information to responders.
- Consult with state and local jurisdictions regarding access to PPE stockpiles if PPE supplies are limited. Consider establishing strike teams for suspected COVID-19 cases and sending in the fewest number of responders in full PPE as safety allows to assess the situation. Follow CDC and NIOSH guidance for strategies for optimizing the supply of PPE including:
  - Using reusable respirators that offer an equivalent or higher level of protection as N95 respirators (e.g., elastomeric respirators, PAPRs, or self-contained breathing apparatus [SCBA] facepieces)
  - Allowing extended use or limited reuse of certain types of PPE (e.g., N95 respirators)
  - Considering the use of PPE past their manufacturer-designated shelf life
- During pre-hospital care, take steps for universal source control for anyone (e.g., EMS providers, patients, family members), regardless of whether they have symptoms:
  - Cloth face coverings are not considered PPE but can be used for source control.
  - PPE (e.g., medical facemasks, N95 respirators) should be reserved for firefighters, EMS providers, and other first responders.
- Consult with your state and local jurisdictions regarding their policies and procedures for critical infrastructure workers, external icon like emergency first responders.
- Follow CDC guidance for when firefighters and EMS providers can return to work:
  - following potential exposure to patients with COVID-19
  - after being diagnosed with confirmed or suspected COVID-19
- Designate a person to be responsible for addressing employees COVID-19 concerns.

## *Where can I get more information?*



Stay informed. Talk to your employer, supervisor, union representative, or occupational health provider who is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. See these sources for more information:

- [NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic website](#)
- [NIOSH Interim Training for Emergency Responders: Reducing Risks Associated with Long Work Hours](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [CDC Interim Guidance for Emergency Medical Services \(EMS\) Systems and 911 Public Safety Answering Points \(PSAPs\) for COVID-19 in the United States](#)
- [CDC Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of PPE](#)
- [CDC Release of Stockpiled N95 Filtering Facepiece Respirators Beyond the Manufacturer-Designated Shelf Life](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 website](#)
- [OSHA COVID-19 website](#)
- CDCINFO: [website](#) | 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348

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## ***15 Fire Safety Tips for Kids They'll Never Forget***

***Keep your family safe from accidents with these fire safety tips for kids.***

***According to the National Fire Prevention Association, 49,300 fires are caused each year by playing with fire, most of these by children. It's especially important to teach fire safety tips to kids in part to prevent fires from happening and in part so that if an accident does occur, your children will know how to protect themselves. Here's how you can teach your kids to be safe.***

### **1. Don't play with matches or lighters**

This is probably the most important and common fire safety tip for kids. Teach your children to stay away from matches and lighters and to never, ever use them without adult supervision and permission. The next tips are for older kids who you may trust with matches around the house.



### **2. Run extinguished matches under water before discarding**

Of all the fire safety tips for kids, this is an easy one to teach by example. If your kids see you run water over a match before tossing it, they will do it themselves in the future so that paper in the trash doesn't accidentally ignite.

### **3. Never leave candles or incense burning**

This tip is probably for your older children, but it doesn't hurt to teach them when they're young that leaving exposed heat sources going is a recipe for disaster. Turn off space heaters and extinguish candles and incense whenever you leave a room.

### **4. Don't over-plug**

In this day and age, we have more electronic devices than ever. Teach your children not to plug too many devices into a single outlet, whether through the use of extension cords or power strips. Even better, for younger kids,

teach them to ask you before they plug in a new device.



## **5. Don't play near fireplaces or stoves**

It's all fun and games until a piece of loose clothing gets too near an open flame or the fireplace grate. Teach your children to play far away from stoves and active fireplaces.

## **6. Keep flammable objects away from the stove**

For those children learning to cook, make sure they know to keep things like dishtowels and oven mitts away from exposed heat sources. It only takes a split second for these to catch fire and cause damage.

## **7. Develop and practice an escape plan**

Fire safety tips for kids should include an escape plan. Make sure your children know what to do in the event of a fire. Map out a plan and practice it with them so they'll know what to do in an emergency.

## **8. Get low, get out**

If an alarm goes off, your children should get low and get out. Teach them about the dangers of smoke as well as fire, and make sure they know to crawl to safety.

## **9. Stop, drop, and roll**

One of the classic fire safety tips for kids is to stop, drop, and roll if your clothes catch fire. Show your children what this looks like and have them practice it with you. It could save their lives.

## **10. Never hide in closets or under beds**

Fires can be scary, but hiding from them can be fatal. Tell your kids never to hide in enclosed areas where they could become trapped.

## **11. Leave your belongings**

We're all attached to our possessions, but nothing is as important as your life when it comes to fire safety. In case of a fire, leave everything behind and get out.





## **12. Don't use the elevator**

It's important that your kids understand an elevator can be a dangerous place when a fire occurs. If you live in an apartment building, make sure your children know to use the stairs instead of an elevator.

## **13. Once in a safe place, call 911**

If there are no adults around, kids escaping a fire should find a safe place like a neighbor's house and call 911. Don't ever call 911 from inside a burning building. Get out first

## **14. (For parents) Fireproof your home**

Help your kids stay safe by safeguarding your home against fires. Use metal gates around stoves and fireplaces to keep children away. Store matches and lighters in a safe place, out of reach of your kids. Don't allow them to have candles until they're old enough to understand and respect open flames. Most importantly, practice what you preach!

## **15. (For parents) Talk to your kids about fire safety**

Of all the fire safety tips for kids, the most important one is actually for the parents. Teach your children about fire safety and what they can do to prevent fires. The more they know, the less likely they are to cause an accident.

# COVID-19: Simple steps firefighters can implement today. The fire service is the best agency to tackle the pandemic; we just need to follow some simple guidelines

Mar 18, 2020

By Trevor Frodge



COVID-19, the novel coronavirus first detected in China, is now running rampant through the United States – and the world.

The escalation of closures of schools, public events, work and travel restrictions, and quarantine measures is alarming to the public and to our public servants. Additionally, there is a rapidly growing amount of misinformation being shared via social media, alleging conspiracies, political motivations for the virus and down-playing the seriousness of the event.

Yet, through all of the confusion, misinformation and fear, the fire service stands ready to tackle this crisis directly on the front lines. We are the best agency for it.



In this March 11, 2020 photo, a Kirkland firefighter wears a mask as he responds to an automatic fire alarm that was accidentally triggered at the Life Care Center in Kirkland, Wash., near Seattle.

## WE HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE – AND WE'RE READY

For years the fire service has dealt with pandemic events. Post-9/11, the fire service answered the call for our first taste of biological terrorism with the anthrax scares. “White powder” calls became commonplace, prompting hazmat responses nationwide. We identified, detected and mitigated hundreds of calls (both real and fictitious) without a single injury or fatality.

Fast forward a few years, and we’ve dealt with H1N1, swine flu and Ebola. Our level of preparedness from the federal level down to the local responder is massive, immense and ready to deploy. We’ve prepared for any emergency and threat as a response agency, and now we are simply facing a new one – COVID-19. We have the training and experience in infectious diseases to help mitigate this problem.

Make no mistake, COVID-19 is a dangerous virus. It is the worst possible kind



of virus we can face in that it is an airborne- and droplet-transmitted disease that spreads rapidly. As a fire service, we must understand and take precautions, but also must educate the public and our membership with facts. Nearly 80% of those infected will have mild symptoms ranging from fever to cough.

Some patients will be more severe, typically those who are older or have other co-morbidities, such as heart problems, lung problems or are immunocompromised. Those patients will likely require hospitalization. Unfortunately, as this pandemic spreads, some of those patients will die, just as many patients die from septic shock every day.

As a response agency, we must be ready and prepared. We cannot afford to put our heads in the sand and believe that this will not affect our communities. It is coming, but we can combat the illness and reduce the panic that is being shown across the country by facing this threat, educating the public, and taking some proactive measures. Because we are one of the most trusted services in the country, and we know our communities better than anyone, we will be the trusted experts that our citizens turn to during their time of need – just like any other emergency.

So what do we do?

### **SIMPLE STEPS TO SERVE – WHILE SAFE**

We must adjust our operations to some extent. My organization has begun screening calls for COVID-19 symptoms. If a patient complains of COVID-19 symptoms such as cough, fever or shortness of breath, that information is relayed to responding units to don appropriate PPE.

We've adjusted our response matrix and how we approach EMS calls. For the time being, we send in a minimum number of personnel to assess the patient. If additional help is needed, that crew radios outside to the engine crew to bring in further equipment. Ideally, if a patient is able to safely do so, have them walk outside to meet EMS crews. Naturally, this is not always possible, and we must remember to put our patients first.

If COVID-19 symptoms are suspected or confirmed crews don the recommended PPE from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). PPE for COVID-19 is a disposable gown to stop droplet transmission to our duty uniforms, gloves to prevent germ transmission to our hands, eye protection to prevent droplets entering our eyes and mucous membranes, and a NIOSH-approved N95 respirator for respiratory protection. If there is low suspicion of infection, then this level of PPE is not needed. Remain cautious, though, de-

pending on where you are responding. For instance, if your running area has commercial office buildings, hotels or multifamily dwellings, consider placing a surgical mask on yourself with eye protection and gloves prior to entering these facilities. Maintain a distance from your patient and limit contact with them as best as possible. Consider placing a surgical mask on them as well to add additional barriers of protection. After the call, ensure your ambulances are decontaminated with viricidal solutions to remain ready.



At the station level, we must remain vigilant and keep our areas clean. My company has instituted a twice-a-day house chore regiment. Surfaces such as door handles and light switches are sprayed down, all surfaces are cleaned with approved cleaners. Keep in mind that the kill time for most cleaners is 10 minutes for biological agents. Spray your surfaces and let them air dry for 10 minutes. Ensure your face-pieces on your SCBA's are cleaned, bunk rooms disinfected, and surfaces within the cab of the apparatus are wiped down.

Some inconveniences will occur within our ranks. We've suspended or limited trips to the store to avoid large crowds and reduce the risk associated with possible contamination. Ensure your department has a plan for crews when they become exposed. How will they be taken off shift? Who will cover their positions? The biggest key is to have a plan. It will be too late when it occurs if a plan is not in place.

Lastly, do not panic. I've heard the phrase that these are "unsettling times." To the public at large, that is true, but for us, this is another task that we've been asked to handle. It is expected that we remain professional, that we hold the line, and that we educate and reduce our risk of exposure as low as reasonably possible.

One way to view this is as a gigantic hazmat run. We can reduce the contamination with limiting contact, wearing masks and respiratory protection, disinfecting and minimizing time with our patients.

## **THIS IS OUR MISSION**

The bottom line: We are the fire service and this is our mission. Let's put our citizens first as we've sworn that we will do. Let's protect our members and keep them safe. Let's educate the public with facts and guidance. Finally, be a fire department. Get outside, pull hose, train hard, and deliver the services our citizens expect and deserve. Stay safe.

Notes:



