

The country has changed since COVID-19 came into our lives. Our First Responders are on the front lines battling it every day. Many have lost their lives or have a colleague who has passed. Anxiety levels are high and first responder suicides are rising. Experts say First Responders not only have to deal with death in their ranks but also the lasting trauma from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Being a First Responder during the pandemic is emotionally taxing and just like 9/11, trauma for first responders from the COVID-19 crisis won't hit until well after the pandemic is over. After 9/11 there was an uptick in suicides and an emotional treatment needs, not in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. It was a year to 18 months after that. That is when experts started to see the uptick in suicides and the uptick in emotional troubles.

What differentiates this crisis, is that the impacts are global. Professional experts believe this pandemic will affect more first responders, which will lead in a higher number of emotional issues and a potential rise in suicides.

First Responders risk their lives every day to help keep us safe, but now every encounter potentially carries the risk of infection. And even as they worry about keeping their communities safe, they are also worried about the health and safety of their families. There's no question that first responders are being subjected to enormous trauma, which really underscores the importance of providing them with mental health support in the days and years ahead. It is **"absolutely critical"** that departments/organizations provide multiple avenues for first responders to seek help, whether it be a chaplain, peer support, EAP, private counseling or a peer. Now more than ever, first responder mental health and wellness must be a priority!

We have a responsibility to keep our first responders safe from both the physical and mental dangers of the job. That means providing the training, personal protective equipment, counseling, and support that they need.

It is with great honor that 1st Responder Conferences brings to all of our first responders the message and training in hope, resiliency and mental health. We have a tough job, every day, and the recent pandemic that we are continuing to work through is the very reason 1st Responder Conferences continues their mission to bring mental health training and resources into the forefront. By bringing speakers and resources to the first responders, their partners and families, we can help to navigate the unique stressors that we have taken on in addition to our everyday work.

We know first-hand how important it is to take care of ourselves, our families and each other.

Please share this information with every first responder you know, encourage them to come and spend two days with us, to learn, to network and to share.