



Memorandum
Law Enforcement Considerations
Coronavirus 2019 (Covid19)

The purpose of this memo is to outline considerations with respect to law enforcement operations during this ongoing state of emergency. Law enforcement, like healthcare is going to be an essential function during the current state of emergency. As with other emergencies and natural disasters consideration has to be given to how law enforcement will function during the emergency. In order to maintain a high level of public safety it is essential that law enforcement consider how operations will impact close contact spread of Covid19 and what steps law enforcement can consider to aid in controlling the virus.

- Consideration of limiting law enforcement operations to those calls of a serious nature where there is an immediate need for investigation i.e. murder, rape, robbery, arson, kidnapping or where there is a threat of injury to a person i.e. domestic assault, assault in progress, murder, rape, robbery, arson, kidnapping etc. Note this is not meant to be an exhaustive list but should convey the idea that if no person is in danger than law enforcement should not respond and expose officers.
- Consideration of limiting pro-active enforcement. On every person to person contact officers are potentially exposed to persons who are contagious. In every traffic stop, every pedestrian stop, and any other contact, the officer will be in close proximity to the subject and may be handling items, i.e. license and registration, that the subject just handled. As such, officers can become exposed and be placed under a 14-day quarantine or worse. In such events the overall numbers of public safety personnel available will thereby be diminished leaving not enough officers available to handle serious public safety events. I would note that common practices in natural disasters, officers are placed in a fixed-position and do not respond to most calls for service during the heightened phase of the storm. Our current storm is Covid19 and a similar approach makes sense.
- Consideration of handling calls where no one is in danger telephonically. Reports of thefts, property, damage, and even minor vehicle accidents can be taken over the telephone. One consideration for agencies with school resource officers is to utilize SROs as part of this function since schools are not in session in most places.
- Consider instructing officers to exercise discretion and avoid arrests for minor offenses that do not endanger others including property crimes. A concern for law enforcement is the spreading of Covid19 to officers, to corrections personnel, and to other persons housed in the jail. Additionally, with courts throughout the country being closed, these arrests will only further backlog the system. Limiting the number of persons housed in a jail or correction facility also plays a role in reducing the potential spread of Covid19 in jails.

- Where charging with a crime is necessary, consideration should be given to citing and releasing the individual rather than taking the subject to a lockup facility.
- Consider matters of transportation. Due to the responsibility law enforcement has to the health and safety of arrestees, it must be recognized that vehicles must be disinfected after the transport of a prisoner so that the next arrestee will not be exposed. Thus, limiting the number of transports by discouraging non-essential arrests reduces the number of exposures.
- Consider the temporary use of flex-cuffs in place of handcuffs. One of the most common spread points being cited is by hand to hand contact. Handcuffs have always been considered by law enforcement to be a breeding ground for germs leading officers to routinely disinfect their handcuffs. In order to minimize handcuffs as a potential carrier of Covid19, officers should be encouraged to use plastic flex-cuffs instead of handcuffs for purposes of single-use and disposal rather than trying to disinfect handcuffs.
- Officers should be provided with and directed to use latex gloves on all calls for service that they respond to and be provided with a trash receptacle in their vehicle where the gloves can be disposed following each call.
- Officers should be directed to maintain safe distances during interviews and other contacts with victims, witnesses, suspects, or any citizen with whom they have contact.
- Officers who are assigned to duties in the station should be directed to disinfect their work area at the start and completion of each shift, to include telephones, computer keyboards and any surfaces the officer touches. Agencies, to the extent possible should limit the use of shared workspaces during this emergency.
- Officers, particularly with shared vehicles, should be directed to disinfect the passenger compartment of their vehicle at the start and end of each shift. This process should include computer/MDT keyboards, all accessory buttons, door handles, and any other surfaces generally touched.
- As noted, every arrest has the potential to expose an officer who will be in close contact with the individual during searching and handcuffing, as well as transport and booking. When officers become exposed or ill due to exposure they will not be available to handle urgent public safety matters. Thus, exposure and contacts should be limited to serious calls where there is threat to the safety of some individual or the crime is of such a serious nature that it must be immediately investigated.
- Every contact that law enforcement has with any member of the public has the potential for exposure to Covid19. In much the same way that the healthcare profession may be overburdened by a spike in patients, public safety will be dramatically impacted by a spike in exposed officers who are forced into quarantine. As with weather related disasters where law enforcement activities are limited during the height of the storm, law enforcement must consider using these same principles during this health related emergency.

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