

Police Planning during a COVID-19 Pandemic

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This document provides a synopsis of the factors that a police agency must consider when writing plans to address operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Start by gaining a *thorough* understanding of the threat.** Before drafting protocols, it is imperative that those who are responsible for the police-related planning have a thorough understanding of the threat, including the impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have on the community and on the police agency's ability to function. Understanding the threat and the issues that will arise will help police officials to accurately assess the planning components and resources needed, as well as to anticipate how a COVID-19 pandemic may change the policing environment and the agency's priorities.
2. **Look for outside resources and promising approaches in other departments.** Very few local policing agencies have completed comprehensive plans for a COVID-19 pandemic, but as more police agencies begin to move forward in the planning process, they may develop resources and planning guidance that will prove useful to other agencies' planning processes. Internet search engines also can be useful in finding the most up-to-date information and in identifying police and other law enforcement agencies that have developed plans.
3. **Set realistic expectations of the police role in a pandemic COVID-19 scenario.** In writing police plans, be very clear about the ability of the agency to assist other agencies during a COVID-19 pandemic. In any large-scale emergency, police resources (and the resources of other first responders) can quickly be overwhelmed. In the case of a COVID-19 pandemic, police agencies are likely to face the additional burden of operating with a reduced workforce, as some of their own officers may become sick or require isolation after being exposed to infected persons. A key part of the jurisdiction-wide planning for a COVID-19 pandemic is to identify the priority roles that only police or other law enforcement agencies can take, and to find alternatives to police assistance where possible.
4. **Use existing plans, and incorporate only the new components that are needed during a COVID-19 pandemic.** Planning for a COVID-19 pandemic can be very similar to planning for other types of critical incidents. While there are COVID-19 pandemic specific components that must be planned for (such as preventing disease transmission in the workplace), plans should be flexible and applicable to other types of public health emergencies. In many cases, the overall emergency planning structure is "modular." Individual modules cover such topics as evacuation of urban areas, or how mortuaries should plan to handle mass fatalities. Depending on the nature of an emergency, different modules can be taken off the shelf and implemented as they would be applicable to any event in which the police workforce is diminished.

¹ Material extracted with sincere thanks and gratitude to the Police Executive Research Forum and its authors: Andrea M. Luna, Corina Solé Brito and Elizabeth A. Sanberg, (October 2007) *Police Planning for an Influenza Pandemic: Case Studies and Recommendations from the Field*, Police Executive Research Forum, Washington, D.C. 20036.

5. **Regularly update the plan.** As new scientific information about COVID-19 becomes available or as situations or resources change, agencies should update their plans and make the new versions available to all personnel. Post agency information and news updates on your intranet or actual bulletin boards, which personnel are instructed to check daily at the beginning of their shifts.
6. **Exercise the plan. Incorporate lessons learned and address components that need additional work.** Provisions of a COVID-19 pandemic plan should be exercised to familiarize personnel with their roles and responsibilities and to identify areas that need additional work. Multi-agency testing of the plan will help identify any misconceptions about roles and responsibilities. Agencies should also incorporate lessons that they learn from exercises or actual uses of the plan.²

EXTERNAL MEASURES

7. **Reach out** to subject matter experts for help in the process. As with other emergency planning efforts, COVID-19 pandemic planning should be a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency effort. Police planning officials should reach out to other subject matter experts who are involved in the jurisdiction's emergency planning, and engage them in the police department's education and planning efforts. Jurisdiction-wide planning efforts will need to involve public health and medical officials, who in turn will be able to help the police and other law enforcement agencies educate themselves and develop their own plans.
8. **Build on existing relationships.** Police officials must identify local subject matter experts, such as public health or medical officials with whom the police agency interacts on a routine basis: either in-house medical professionals or external public health officials as early as possible in the planning process.
9. **Identify relevant public health laws and authorities.** Police agency personnel need to become familiar with the relevant public health laws governing any response to a COVID-19 pandemic, such as the laws that specify who has the authority to declare a public health emergency, and any laws that give policing agencies special powers during this time. A good understanding of the role of police and other law enforcement in enforcing public health orders will help policing agencies know what will be expected of them in enforcing quarantines and other sensitive matters. Police agencies may look to local public health officials for assistance in identifying relevant laws and regulations and in determining how this information will be incorporated into their internal COVID-19 pandemic response plans and training efforts, as well as in multi-agency efforts.
10. **Include other local criminal justice entities in the planning efforts.** Recognize that the functioning of other components of the justice system, such as courts, correctional agencies, and other law enforcement agencies, will likely be impaired during the pandemic. Work with other local criminal justice entities to determine how each agency's plans may overlap and affect those of other criminal justice sectors.
11. **Develop a public communication strategy in advance.** Work with public health officials to develop

² For example, Toronto incorporated the lessons learned from its experience with SARS into its current public health emergency/pandemic COVID-19 plan. London's Metropolitan Police Service participated in several local and national exercises of the city's plan and identified a few areas for further development, such as local handling of mass fatalities. London's recent experience with the Polonium-210 poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko underscored the importance of obtaining accurate and reliable information about the nature of a public health threat and the risk to first responders.

messages and strategies for communicating risks to the community. Communications should include accurate and timely information and should follow responsible risk communication guidelines that will reduce unnecessary fear and panic as well as unwarranted, but opportunistic blame for the pandemic being directed at the more vulnerable sections of society. Messages should be very clear in explaining the threat, providing guidance on what the public should do in the event of an emergency, and emphasizing the importance and direct benefit to the community and its healthy system of voluntary compliance with public health orders (such as self-quarantine and “social distancing” measures that are designed to prevent the congregation of people in movie theatres, churches, nightclubs, or other confined spaces where contagion is likely). It may be beneficial for the police agency to communicate in concrete terms on their on-going enforcement activities, e.g. on number of checkpoints established, people stopped, fines issued, and more serious charges invoked etc. to ‘further encourage’ compliance.

12. Police and other law enforcement personnel should be well versed in how to describe the COVID-19 pandemic threat and the importance of voluntary compliance for oneself and the benefit of the community and the local health-care system, so they can improve public understanding in all of their contacts with members of the community. Some agencies recommend additional training for key spokespersons on the issue.

INTERNAL MEASURES

13. **Be strategic in determining how staffing losses may impact the functioning of the department.** Work with each unit in the agency to identify its core functions, and think about how the activities required to perform those core functions would be affected during a COVID-19 pandemic. Also consider what outside services and resources the agency depends on for carrying out these activities, and ensure that those services and resources will be available. Identify police activities that can be suspended if necessary, and decide at what point each activity would be curtailed as a pandemic worsened.
14. Look for alternative ways to accomplish the functions that are critical and must be maintained—for example, through use of technology and teleworking/commuting. Develop strategies for informing the public about the suspension of non-critical police and other law enforcement duties.
15. **Ensure that responses to the pandemic are proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory.** Noting the precautionary measures recommended by the WHO, and given that national police and other law enforcement agencies will need to continue to address not only matters of public safety, but also those related to public health concerns before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, police, other law enforcement entities, their relevant ministries and judicial authorities therefore should consider whether it is possible to limit arrests and/or detentions temporarily to only those offenses which pose an immediate threat to the community in order to reduce pressure on places of detention and prisons during this period.
16. At the same time, they should expect likely to see an increase in the calls for service owing to the conditions surrounding the response to COVID-19 pandemic:
 - a. Domestic violence / SGBV;
 - b. Inter-community violence;

- c. Police relationship with the communities impacted by the enforcement of COVID-19 measures, particularly related to enforcing confinement policies and public order management while maintaining respect for human rights;
- d. Prejudice and violence against those suspected of having COVID-19 as well as foreigners / specific minorities / refugees and other newly vulnerable groups;
- e. Trafficking and smuggling of people;
- f. Counterfeiting of medicines and medical goods; and
- g. Civil unrest focused at medical treatment centres, food outlets and distribution centres, warehouses containing and suspected to contain in-demand items, and other critical infrastructure.

17. Identify the key skills needed to maintain critical functions, and cross-train personnel to provide backup. For critical functions, look for ways to cross-train additional employees to be able to perform these functions if necessary. Identify the special skills required to carry out the critical department functions—especially tasks carried out by small, highly specialized units—and then identify other personnel or volunteers in the department who possess these skills or could be trained in them. Consider utilizing pre-existing databases that contain the names of employees with particular skills, such as training in disarming bombs to fluency in languages, motor vehicle repair skills, and the ability to drive heavy trucks. These staffers could be called on during an emergency to use their secondary or additional skills to perform functions they might not usually perform.

18. Plan for sustaining police and other law enforcement operations with minimum staffing over the long term.

It may become difficult for agencies to sustain operations—even those that are given the highest priority—for very long. Within a matter of weeks, an agency could find itself operating with half of its normal workforce. Officials need to consider how to supplement the department’s workforce, for example by using pre-existing networks of volunteers. Also be aware of the need to prevent burnout and fatigue among the employees who do not become sick, some of whom may try to work many additional hours to help maintain the agency’s critical functions. Therefore, resist moving to 12-hour shifts for as long as possible to prevent employee fatigue.

19. Build on processes that are already internalized within the agency. “Ramping up” operations in response to large events—and subsequently scaling back—is a common practice for police agencies. As more agencies adopt Comp-Stat or other systems that involve strategically redeploying resources, such changes are becoming ingrained in the daily operating culture of policing. Planning for a pandemic can build on these basic principles. However, it is important to note that there are some agency functions that traditionally have not needed to ramp up or down to any great extent, such as administrative functions and buildings maintenance. Those units may need additional training to become familiar with the concepts of scaling back operations.

20. Begin agency education efforts as soon as possible. An educated workforce will better understand the COVID-19 pandemic threat. That will help reduce fear and ensure that if a COVID-19 pandemic begins, employees will adhere to good hygiene recommendations that could significantly dampen the spread of the illness. Many educational resources already developed by national health agencies

may be easily incorporated into your agency's educational efforts. Educate employees about how new plans and policies fit within the existing emergency operations framework. Plans also need to ensure that timely and accurate information will be provided to agency personnel during a COVID-19 pandemic. The degree to which employees understand the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the impact of the pandemic on the agency's workforce, and how well it is able to communicate information about the threat and manage fear during interactions with the public.

21. Communicate regularly throughout the planning process (both internally and externally).

Ongoing communications are imperative to maintaining momentum in the planning process and to ensuring a coordinated response. Police agency officials should endeavour to obtain feedback from agency personnel and meet regularly with others involved in the local process, to review the plan and update each other on new planning efforts. For example, use regularly scheduled meetings to facilitate continued discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic plan at the highest levels of authority.

22. Use technology as a force multiplier. Be creative in identifying ways in which technology may assist during an emergency. Jurisdictions that have a capacity for "teleworking" or "telecommuting"—allowing employees to access computer databases from remote locations, including home—should consider how they could use that capacity during a COVID-19 pandemic without compromising critical databases. Other strategic uses of technology, such as enabling residents to report nonviolent crimes via the internet or setting up special hotlines or telephone reporting units, can lessen the demand on police personnel during a COVID-19 pandemic or other critical incident.

23. Carefully consider the amount and type of personal protective equipment (PPE) and emergency supplies needed, and consider staggered purchases so that equipment with a limited shelf- life will not expire all at once. Police agencies' health planning officials need to work with other government and law enforcement agencies to determine what types of PPE are being stockpiled locally and what the agency should consider stockpiling on its own. Planning officials should carefully determine what is reasonable to stockpile, in light of the anticipated need for various products and the fact that some products have a limited shelf-life. This should be done with the assistance of the occupational health department and/or within the state's own guidelines. When stockpiling PPE, it is recommended to make staggered purchases to avoid a "lump sum" investment in PPE that will all expire at the same time (thus requiring another lump-sum investment to maintain the stockpile). Also, carefully consider which types of PPE should remain in a central location and which should be immediately disseminated to personnel. Immediate dissemination of large quantities of PPE may result in undue concern and misuse (or unnecessary use) of the equipment, and will deplete the supply. And some types of PPE can deteriorate if left in the trunk of a police vehicle, for example.³ Agencies may consider setting up priority agreements with vendors to supply additional resources on an as-needed basis.

24. Review leave policies that may encourage staff to report to work when sick or possibly exposed.

Police and other law enforcement officials should review current sick-leave and family-leave policies to ensure that staff who are infected or who may have been exposed to the disease will not report to work. Officials in the studied sites noted that infected employees who report to work can do more harm than good if they infect other personnel. Quarantined staff who have had an on-the-job

³ See, for example, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/191518.htm>, *Guide for the Selection of Personal Protection Equipment for Emergency First Responders*, NIJ Guide 102-00. November 2002.

exposure to the COVID-19 virus need to be compensated as if they were “on duty” during their regularly scheduled shifts. This will encourage officers to report possible exposures and to comply with quarantine orders. However, such policies need to be written carefully in order to avoid encouraging excessive absences.

25. **Consider making recommendations that staff can share with family members (i.e., create a family plan).** Protecting the families of police agency personnel is critical to the continuity of police operations. Including “family plans” in a COVID-19 pandemic plan can help ensure that the greatest number of staff possible will report for duty. With this in mind, agencies are encouraged to provide a list of recommended items for families to stockpile; such as water, canned food, antiseptic, and gloves.

CONCLUSION

26. These experiences underscore the need to approach the planning process systematically and logically, beginning with a thorough understanding of the issue. Lessons identified indicate that agency officials should focus on developing a flexible plan that builds on current public health recommendations specific to a COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging and educating the agency, as well as incorporating existing multi-agency planning and emergency response efforts into the plan, will assist in the agency’s preparation process. As one official noted, “The planning process is just as important as the outcome—you have to go through the educational process of understanding the risk and thinking through the issues to truly understand the impact. Then, you (as an agency) are able to break it down to its most simple elements.”

Annex 1: COVID – 19 - Potential Criminal Threats

The following are some areas most likely to see an increase in the calls for service owing to the conditions surrounding the response to COVID-19 pandemic:

- o Domestic violence / SGBV
- o Intercommunity violence
- o Police relationship with the communities impacted by the enforcement of COVID-19 measures
- o Prejudice and violence against those suspected of having COVID-19 as well as foreigners / specific minorities / refugees and other newly vulnerable groups
- o Trafficking and smuggling of people
- o Counterfeiting of medicines and medical goods
- o Civil unrest focused at medical treatment centres, food outlets and distribution centres, warehouses containing and suspected to contain in-demand items, and other critical infrastructure.

These areas as well as additional ones may benefit from more detailed specific guidance, Therefore, police agencies are encouraged to contact the following persons with their specific thematic guidance requests:

- i) **Sofiene Bacha**, Policy Specialist, Rule of Law, Security & Human Rights Team for Sustainable Peace and Development, Crisis Bureau, UNDP (sofiene.bacha@undp.org)
- ii) **Andrew Carpenter**, Chief – Strategic Policy and Development Section; Police Division, Department of Peace Operations (carpentera@un.org)
- iii) ... other Representatives of UN AFPs

Annex 2: Preventing Exposure

2. If you are sick but not sure, notify your supervisor, stay at home, and **do not come to work**. Consult with a doctor or certified medical service for diagnosing and advices, and present to your supervisor for further assessment and instruction.
3. On your way to the police installation: wear a disposable surgical mask in case of using mass transport/ sharing vehicle with others. At the entrance, a temperature checkpoint setup by the Mission, should be used by both officers and visitors. Those exceeding **38C (100F)** should not enter.
4. Practice proper hand hygiene. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (“Happy Birthday” song sang twice). If soap and water are not readily available use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
5. Avoid touching your face, to avoid unintentional transmission.
6. Thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces using appropriate detergent/disinfectant solutions or wipes, including workstations, vehicles, and surroundings.
7. Maintaining good health, getting enough rest, maintain a moderate exercise programme, eating healthfully, avoiding tobacco use, etc.
8. Keeping current on vaccinations.
9. When interacting with any other individual including a member of the public exhibiting upper respiratory symptoms (sneezing, coughing), provide them a P-100 or N-95 mask if one is available, or stand **2 metre / 6 feet** away.
10. All police officers must be provided with proper Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE). Where such PPE is in limited supply, those on operational duties or require contact with others, shall be prioritized.
11. In the case of interacting with members of the public suspected of having COVID-19, proper PPE is:
 - a. P-100 or N-95 masks
 - b. Eye protection (safety goggles or face shield)
 - c. Nitrile/latex/rubber gloves

Annex 3: Operational Procedures to follow when allowing visitors to police premises

1. All visitors must be considered as potentially affected by COVID 19 therefore all preventive measures must be taken accordingly. Nevertheless, full respect of human rights principles shall always be considered.
2. Visitors should be allowed to visit only specific areas identified within the police premises, preferably one office just dedicated for such purpose. Such area must be disinfected and cleaned frequently, ideally after each visit, at least surfaces touched by visitors should be cleaned and disinfected after each visit.
3. A dedicated and isolated waiting area should be identified in case that more visitors are present at the same time, such area should meet all the general requirements to prevent the contamination of the virus.
4. Any interaction with Police personnel and others should occur only in the designated area;
5. Each visitor before entering the premises should be provided with a surgical mask to wear during the entire presence in the premises and interaction with police officers and other persons
6. Procedures must be identified for the disposal of surgical masks provided to the visitors;
7. All Police personnel must wear PPE during the entire interaction with visitors;
8. It is a command responsibility to ensure that all police personnel and civilians working for police inside the premises receive proper and regular training on these operational procedures.