



INTERPOL

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
PROTECTING POLICE AND  
COMMUNITIES**

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**GUIDELINES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Second edition

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November 2020







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Since the outbreak of COVID-19, law enforcement has played a crucial role in supporting efforts to control the disease and promote safer communities, as well as combating threats from criminals taking advantage of the outbreak to increase or diversify their activities.

As of October 2020, more than one million people had died as a result of COVID-19, including hundreds of police officers.

INTERPOL, in accordance with international best practices including the WHO's recommendations, urges its member countries to follow these updated guidelines in order to enhance the safety and effectiveness of law enforcement support in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak.

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**Disclaimer:** These guidelines are meant to be considered by law enforcement agencies as part of a response strategy to the outbreak and in close cooperation with national public health authorities. Their purpose is to supplement rather than replace national guidelines. All measures taken by national law enforcement authorities should be in conformity with the applicable national legislation and international obligations.



These recommendations also incorporate information about increased illegal activity and/or intent across a range of crime areas.

It is essential for law enforcement and communities they serve to work together to effectively address the COVID-19 threat. Respecting and protecting individuals' rights and encouraging local cooperation, not only facilitates compliance with law enforcement officers' requests, but also ensures the centrality of human rights in shaping the pandemic response.

In the context of COVID-19, INTERPOL is publishing this second edition of the COVID-19 Guidelines for Law Enforcement. Recognizing the response to COVID-19 varies from one country to another due to cultural, economic and social differences, the updated Guidelines seek to integrate best practices drawn from law enforcement across the globe. This guidance from lessons learned is aimed at supporting member countries which are continuing to develop and review their response strategies.



# 1.

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## COVID-19: CURRENT STATUS

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### 1.1 SYMPTOMS

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness and a dry cough. Some patients may also experience aches and pains, nasal congestion, a runny nose, sore throat, diarrhoea, loss of taste or smell, skin rash, and/or discoloration of the fingers or toes. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Most people recover from the disease without requiring medical attention.

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### 1.2 VULNERABLE GROUPS

Particular attention should be paid to older people and those with underlying medical problems such as high blood pressure, respiratory or heart problems, diabetes, or deficient immune systems. These people are more likely to develop a serious illness.



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## 1.3 TRANSMISSION MODE

Transmission mostly occurs through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are spread from person to person when somebody with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, speaks, sings or breathes heavily, particularly in indoor, crowded and inadequately ventilated spaces where short-range aerosol transmission cannot be excluded. It is also possible to catch COVID-19 by touching objects or surfaces contaminated by these droplets, then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. Some reports have indicated that people with no symptoms can transmit the virus; however, the frequency of such transmission it is not yet known.

[Watch video ▶](#)



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### COUGH / EXHALE



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### CONTAMINATED OBJECTS AND SURFACES



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### PHYSICAL CONTACT



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### TOUCHING EYES, NOSE OR MOUTH



# 2.

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## RECOMMENDED PROTECTION MEASURES

There is currently no vaccine or specific treatment for COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness and contamination spread is to **avoid exposure to the virus.**

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Practice **proper and frequent handwashing** or use hand-sanitizer.

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**Do not touch your face** with unwashed hands.

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Apply **physical distancing measures**<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The WHO recommendation is to stay at least one meter away from others (some national guidelines recommend more).



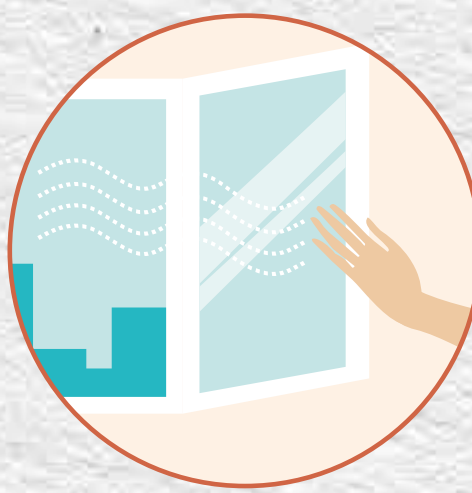


Considering the transmission mode of the disease, law enforcement officers who are in contact with the general population and unable to maintain physical distancing are recommended to **wear masks and/or gloves** if available.

[Watch video ▶](#)

Important to note that personal protective equipment (PPE) only protects the user and others if used and disposed of properly.

[More information ▶](#)



**Ensure frequent cleaning/ disinfection** of workspace and air as often as possible.



**Clean or decontaminate work equipment** if there has been possible contact with a COVID-19 patient and self-monitor for signs of illness (refer to paragraph 1.1).



**Seek medical advice** in the case of any symptoms, as per your national public health recommendations.



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## PROTECTING PARTNERS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS AFTER YOUR SHIFT

Law enforcement duties have the potential to expose officers to COVID-19, particularly when coming in close contact with the public. When returning home, law enforcement officers should maintain physical distancing measures and follow these steps:

- ▶ **Clean or decontaminate work equipment, while avoiding the spread of particles/dust.**
- ▶ **Take off work clothes and wash them with detergent as soon as feasible. Handle, transport and wash them in way that limits exposure to skin, eyes, environment and other clean clothes (avoid shaking clothes);**
- ▶ **Take a shower or wash exposed skin with soap and water;**
- ▶ **Self-monitor for signs of illness (refer to paragraph 1.1). In the case of any symptoms, do not report back to work, but seek medical advice as per your national public health recommendations.**



# 3.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT DUTIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Most countries across the world have reported cases of COVID-19, resulting in strict government measures to protect populations and prevent contamination spread.

In certain contexts, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the adoption of exceptional measures limiting or suspending the full and effective exercise of certain fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom of movement and freedom of peaceful assembly. Indeed, such exceptional measures may be taken for the purpose of protecting the health and well-being of the population or responding to the exigencies of an emergency.

Law enforcement agencies have a key role to play in both supporting the implementation of public health measures to contain the outbreak and in preventing specific criminal activities arising in this context. The evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic at local, national and global levels requires law enforcement agencies to adapt their missions and apply specific precaution measures.

These guidelines are intended to raise awareness among law enforcement agencies and should be considered in accordance with applicable human rights standards, national legislation, policing best practices and in coordination with national public health authorities.



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## 3.1 SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

Based on the situation at national and local levels, and as per relevant interagency COVID-19 response strategies, law enforcement may be involved in supporting public health control measures in a number of tasks. All protection measures mentioned earlier apply to the following tasks:

- 3.1.1 RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENTS**
- ▶ **At border crossing points;**
  - ▶ **In areas under lockdown.**

### Recommendations:

- ▶ Apply physical distancing measures.
- ▶ Avoid or limit direct contact with documents.
- ▶ Wear PPE (when available and recommended by public health authorities).
- ▶ Limit contact and practice hand hygiene when dealing with members of the public.
- ▶ Ensure frequent cleaning/disinfection of work environment and air as often as possible.



### 3.1.2 PUBLIC ORDER

Ensuring public order is critical in and around containment areas, critical infrastructure and where people gather, for instance, at pharmacies and shops.

- ▶ **Critical infrastructure such as hospitals, laboratories, police stations, detention centres, and essential businesses should be cordoned where necessary.**

Law enforcement officers should be aware of an increased risk of:

- ▶ **jailbreaks (such cases have already been reported);**
- ▶ **Population unrest/riots (over restrictions, food concerns, control measures, etc.).**

#### **Recommendations:**

- ▶ **Apply physical distancing measures.**
- ▶ **Wash hands and face as soon as possible.**
- ▶ **Clean equipment and work environment after use.**
- ▶ **During public order operations, if appropriate physical distancing cannot be relied on, it is recommended that law enforcement officers wear appropriate PPE and/or protect their faces from the spread of droplets (the choice of PPE should be based on the task and associated risks). Public order operations should be conducted in line with national legislation and with due respect to international human rights standards.**
- ▶ **Pay particular attention to maintaining public order inside and outside prisons. Developing specific communication materials related to preventive and control measures concerning detention centres could play a role in maintaining order.**



- 3.1.3 CONTACT TRACING** ▶ **When a patient shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, public health practitioners will seek to identify people who have been in potential contact with the affected patient through contact tracing.**

Law enforcement services can be requested support national public health services in identifying and locating individuals who have been in close contact with confirmed cases.

With law enforcement often called upon to lead track and trace efforts, officers play a critical role in guarding against any misuse or abuse of investigative resources.

It is critical for officers to ensure they work within the framework of national legislation and strictly adhere to rules and regulations.

### **Recommendation:**

- ▶ **Use proportionate police investigation resources to help identify, locate or trace individuals who have been in contact with COVID-19 patients. Such activities should be conducted in strict compliance with national legislation and with due respect to individuals' rights.**



- 3.1.4** ▶ **SECURING THE DELIVERY OF EMERGENCY SUPPLIES** ▶ In a crisis context, emergency supplies (medical equipment, PPE, etc.) must be securely delivered to healthcare centers, storage facilities and distribution centres.

#### **Recommendation:**

- ▶ Consider using either private security, military or law enforcement escorts in order to secure these deliveries and prevent thefts or attacks.

- 3.1.5** ▶ **PUBLIC MESSAGING** ▶ In coordination with government agencies and health agencies, law enforcement can play an active role in relaying national public health measures to the population.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ▶ Stay up-to-date on the evolution of national public health control measures.
- ▶ Relay national public advice and information about preparedness measures and to the public.
- ▶ Encourage interagency coordination to ensure consistent messages to the public.
- ▶ Encourage the reporting of rumours through proper mechanisms and work with private industry to combat fake messages.
- ▶ Inform the public of criminal activities linked to the current outbreak.



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## 3.2 PREVENTING SPECIFIC ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES ARISING FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS CONTEXT

Increased illegal activity and/or intent have been observed in the following crime areas. This requires heightened attention from the law enforcement community.

### 3.2.1 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Stress, financial insecurity, difficult living conditions or ill health can all contribute to making violence more likely.

- ▶ **Domestic violence:** following the implementation of lockdown measures, law enforcement agencies have reported a sharp increase in cases of domestic violence. Many victims are trapped within their homes with limited possibilities of engaging with the outside world. Law enforcement agencies should be prepared to respond to this global trend and allocate appropriate resources to tackling the crisis.
- ▶ **Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse:** victims of domestic child sexual exploitation and abuse may be in lockdown with the offender with reduced access to guardians such as teachers, doctors and social services who are often key in identifying and reporting of abuse. Countries have reported increased obstacles for victims to





3.2.1 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE  
(CONTINUED)

report offences and seek medical treatment and other forms of support. This has resulted in underreporting of certain types of offences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ▶ **Online child sexual abuse:** children are at increased risk of sexual exploitation by predators operating online. Countries have seen increased reporting of online child sexual abuse offences by the public as well as increased online activity relating to the distribution of child sexual abuse material. With fewer service provider moderators available to review such material, due to work-from-home conditions, reporting and removal may be slower and less effective than usual.
- ▶ **Darknet child sexual offender activities:** offenders active on the Darknet are openly discussing how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their illicit activities and access to children.

### Recommendations:

- ▶ Develop an appropriate strategy for the deployment of first-line officers to ensure sufficient representation of female officers can continue with front-line duties.



- ▶ Work with civil-society groups and frontline social-service providers (e.g. teachers, social workers and youth groups) to reach out to victims of domestic abuse and people in vulnerable situations.
- ▶ Maintain outreach to children and youth who are vulnerable to becoming victims of abuse or engaging in criminal behavior.
- ▶ Engage in public awareness campaigns to educate children and parents on online safety and deter offenders.
- ▶ Consider enabling new reporting channels for child sexual abuse such as text messaging/online, or collaborate with existing hotlines.
- ▶ Monitoring of clearnet and Darknet sites to detect and investigate criminal activity.
- ▶ Upload child sexual abuse material to the INTERPOL International Child Sexual Exploitation database for analysis to ensure international cooperation for the identification of victims and offenders.



### 3.2.2 INTIMIDATION AND DELIBERATE CONTAMINATION SPREAD

Law enforcement agencies should consider increasing their monitoring based on the following modi operandi, which refer to deliberate acts with an actual risk of contamination spread (such acts should be further assessed on a case-by-case basis).

- ▶ Instances of individuals spitting and coughing in the faces of law enforcement officers, health practitioners and essential workers to intimidate them. This could represent a risk if these individuals are infected with COVID-19.
- ▶ Attempts at deliberate contamination by spitting and coughing on surfaces and objects have been reported.
- ▶ Despite limited risk, a few cases of threatening letters allegedly contaminated with COVID-19 targeted political figures. This modus operandi could also target other vulnerable groups mentioned in section 1.3.
- ▶ Certain infected individuals may deliberately move from affected areas to non-affected areas, despite their medical condition and any travel restrictions in place.
- ▶ Instances of individuals claiming to sell contaminated samples of body fluids online have been reported.

#### Recommendations





## Recommendations:

- ▶ Law enforcement officers should take particular care when approaching uncooperative individuals and wear PPE (when available).
- ▶ In police stations, surfaces accessible to the public should be frequently disinfected.
- ▶ Border police officers should report any individual showing symptoms at crossing points.
- ▶ Specialized investigators in cybercrime or counter-terrorism should pay particular attention to online market places.
- ▶ Postal and front-desk services should be informed of the biological threat posed by suspicious packages and follow the recommended protection measures listed in section 2.
- ▶ Law enforcement officers involved in public order or in charge of protecting prominent public figures should be made aware of these risks.



### 3.2.3 **FAKE AND COUNTERFEIT MEDICAL PRODUCTS**

The COVID-19 pandemic has offered an opportunity for fast cash as predatory criminals take advantage of the high market demand for personal protection and hygiene products. The results of Operation Pangea and other initiatives, conducted by INTERPOL with enforcement partners from March 2020 onwards, have shown an increase in fake or counterfeit medical items available on the market, including:

- ▶ **Disposable surgical masks**
- ▶ **Hand sanitizers**
- ▶ **Antiviral and antimalarial medication**
- ▶ **Vaccines**
- ▶ **COVID-19 test kits**

#### **Recommendations:**

- ▶ **Law enforcement agencies should pay particular attention to the above list of fake or counterfeit items.**
- ▶ **The general public should be informed about false or misleading online advertisements related to these products.**
- ▶ **National reporting hotlines should be employed to identify such scams at an early stage.**



### 3.2.4 FRAUD AND MONEY LAUNDERING

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, various fraud and scam schemes taking advantage of the crisis situation have been reported. These schemes can be categorized as follow:

- ▶ **Online fraud:** scammers create and set up fraudulent websites, e-commerce platforms, social media accounts and emails claiming to sell and deliver medical products. In some cases, they use the names of prominent companies involved in the production and distribution of these items. Victims are then asked to pay via bank transfer.
- ▶ **Telephone fraud:** there have been reports of emerging telecom fraud and telephone deception related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A caller pretending to be a relative currently being treated at hospital contacts the elderly by phone. Victims are then asked to pay for the cost of the medical treatment by transferring money or by paying cash to fake public health representatives.
- ▶ **Phishing:** letters or emails related to the pandemic are sent by criminals claiming to be



health authorities with the aim of tricking victims into connecting to a specific webpage and logging in with their real email address and password. Scammers then use their credentials to access sensitive information and potentially steal funds.

- ▶ **Misuse of public funds:** funds from government stimulus packages, which support SMEs (small/medium enterprises) and self-employed persons, are diverted by criminals. The latter clone government websites and/or forge application documents to exploit vulnerabilities in the application and distribution process.
- ▶ **Cash stockpiling:** criminal groups facing difficulties in moving physical cash may opt to wait until travel restrictions are lifted to resume risky bulk movements or switch to other alternatives.
- ▶ **COVID-19 cover-up businesses:** criminals using health-related equipment or services may cover up suspicious transactions in order to integrate money into the legal economy.



- ▶ **Unregulated financial services:** illicit money can be used to finance businesses and individuals with financial difficulties, prompting them to stray from the formal banking credit system. Funds may also continue to be moved via unregulated services like Hawala or cryptocurrencies.
- ▶ **Money mules:** criminals may recruit money mules (bank accounts or persons) during the recovery period by targeting unemployed or individuals struggling financially. Mule account networks can be used to perform international transactions with money derived from COVID-19 fraud.
- ▶ **Other scams:** criminals may pretend to represent investment companies (offering miracle opportunities), COVID-19 charities, or may pose as government officials.

### Recommendations:

- ▶ Publish INTERPOL Purple Notices to inform the law enforcement community of emerging and high-risk modi operandi.
- ▶ Law enforcement should warn the population about these crimes through public messaging.



### 3.2.5 CYBERCRIME

Cybercriminals continue to take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to launch a variety of cyberattacks. The latest threats include the following:

- ▶ The number of malware and ransomware campaigns using COVID-19 and infecting computer systems of individuals and organizations continues to rise.
- ▶ Cybercriminals are targeting sites where system access or data is critical for the deployment of ransomware. This enables them to demand a higher ransom. Organizations such as governments, critical infrastructure and healthcare sector are at particular risk.
- ▶ The online thirst for information on COVID-19 and the need for key supplies provide an ideal scenario for criminals to create malicious domains and commit online scams and phishing.
- ▶ Security threats continue to surface due to vulnerabilities associated with a remote workforce.

### Recommendations





## Recommendations:

### For individuals:

- ▶ avoid opening suspicious emails and clicking on links in unrecognized emails and attachments;
- ▶ back up online and offline files regularly and securely;
- ▶ use strong passwords; and,
- ▶ keep software, including anti-virus software, up-to-date.

### For companies:

- ▶ Reinforce cybersecurity best practices and set up clear guidelines on remote working.
- ▶ Install real-time anti-virus scans and anti-malware software on all company computers and other devices.
- ▶ Ensure sufficient digital capacity and full disk encryption on company devices and maintain visibility on devices.
- ▶ Implement network segmentation and keep IoT devices separate from other critical systems and networks.
- ▶ Invest in multi-factor authentication regardless of business size



# 4.

## LIFTING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN MEASURES

Based on the public health recommendations, and when required by the epidemiological situation at a national level, governments can decide to put certain areas under lockdown. This has a direct impact on policing activities, as well as on the workforce.

When the situation improves these movement restrictions are gradually lifted in consultation with the public health authorities. As a result, the general population is allowed to come and go in strict compliance with the health measures that remain in place.

In order for policing activities to resume in a safe manner, law enforcement agencies are encouraged to prepare a business recovery plan.

In the light of this new context, the recovery plan should take into account the new crime landscape (described in section 3), as well as the increase in policing duties related to a 'return to normal'. Law enforcement agencies must continue to ensure their officers' health and safety by applying all recommended protection measures, as described in section 2.

Public messaging campaigns are also encouraged to better inform the general population about the new rules for interacting with law enforcement (i.e. when reporting a crime at a police station).

The evolution of the epidemiological situation will impact the implementation of new restrictive measures: partial or full lockdown of some areas cannot be excluded. Therefore, the law enforcement and public health cooperation at national level is crucial and should guide any decision related to the implementation of a recovery plan.



# 5.

## INTERPOL'S GLOBAL SUPPORT

COVID-19 presents a global challenge not only for law enforcement, but also for society as a whole.

The pandemic knows no borders and our individual and collective responses are essential to lessening its current and future impact.

The reasons INTERPOL was created nearly 100 years ago are even more valid today. We will continue to provide whatever support is necessary to our member countries, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Our secure global network will ensure vital policing information continues to arrive where it is needed.

Our specialist crime units will ensure that the latest trends and threats related to COVID-19 will be shared.

Our Command and Coordination Centre will ensure your calls for assistance are answered.

INTERPOL remains committed to working with you to make the world a safer place.



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ **INTERPOL COVID-19 Global Assessment and crime specific Reports have been disseminated to all National Central Bureaus**

- ▶ **INTERPOL Posters on COVID-19 Recommendations for law enforcement**

**More information ▶**

- ▶ **Learn more about the origin of COVID-19, symptoms and transmission mode**

**Watch video ▶**

- ▶ **COVID-19 advice for the public: questions and answers (available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic)**

**More information ▶**

- ▶ **The INTERPOL Virtual Academy offers a variety of online courses. Accessible through your INTERPOL National Central Bureaus, this platform is available to all law enforcement officers.**





INTERPOL

## ABOUT INTERPOL

INTERPOL's role is to enable police in our 194 member countries to work together to fight transnational crime and make the world a safer place. We maintain global databases containing police information on criminals and crime, and we provide operational and forensic support, analysis services and training. These policing capabilities are delivered worldwide and support three global programmes: counter-terrorism, cybercrime, and organized and emerging crime.



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