

# Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

### Best Practices from On-Site Assessment at the Firehouses/Ambulance Quarters-Shared Living Houses

These best practices were developed based on the on-site assessment of firehouses and ambulance quarters/shared living houses, to reduce the potential exposure of members to COVID-19. The following best practices are meant to assist provider agencies in developing their own procedures. For additional guidance please visit [ph.lacounty.gov/acd/ncorona2019/](http://ph.lacounty.gov/acd/ncorona2019/).



#### KEY POINTS:

- Facial coverings must be worn in public and workplace settings.
- Wash hands frequently for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60% or greater alcohol content.
- Emphasize the importance of physical distancing > 6 feet apart.
- Monitor all members twice daily, preferably once before start of shift and before ending shift (12 hours apart).
- Implement procedures to keep a log, including temperature and symptom checks should an outbreak/cluster occurs, and a line list be requested.
- No visitors should be allowed in the fire station and/or ambulance quarters, unless they are an essential worker.
- Stagger meals as much as possible, eat alone in the room and/or limit the number of members to maintain physical distancing in the communal/dining area.
- Be flexible with new changes (closure of gyms and utilize other means of communication instead of in person meetings/huddles). Transmission of disease is much lower when physical activity and conditioning are done outdoors and physically distanced from others. (See [Reopening Protocols for Gyms and Fitness Establishments](#) for additional measures related to physical distancing and infection control.)
- Frequently clean and disinfect the fire station and/or ambulance quarters.
- Provide education regarding the difference between quarantine vs. isolation, in the event of an exposure and COVID-19 confirmed positive test.



#### INFECTION PREVENTION STRATEGIES

The following are strategies that help prevent the transmission of COVID-19:

- EMS Members: To lower the risk of spread of COVID-19, the [State of California](#) and Los Angeles County Department of Public Health require that people wear a face covering in public and workplace settings. A face covering is a simple barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the cloth face covering coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice. This provides “source control.” Clinical and laboratory studies show that face coverings reduce the spray of droplets when worn over both the nose **and** mouth.
- EMS Members: When working or riding together in a vehicle, ensure all persons are wearing their appropriate mask or face covering and are seated as far apart from each other as possible. Improve the air ventilation inside the vehicle, if possible, by opening the windows or setting the air ventilation/air conditioning on non-recirculation mode.
- Encourage and remind all members to practice physical distancing, which is keeping a safe space of

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6 feet or more between yourself and other people who are not from your household. Stay at least 6 feet apart from other people in both indoor and outdoor spaces. Physical distancing should be practiced in combination with other preventative measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (wearing cloth face coverings and performing frequent hand hygiene).

- Encourage members to avoid touching their face with unwashed or unsanitized hands.
- Optimize frequent hand hygiene—either washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer. If available, hand washing is preferred. Moments for hand hygiene include but are not limited to:
  - After one has been in a public space;
  - After blowing one’s nose, coughing or sneezing;
  - Before eating or preparing meals;
  - After using the restroom;
  - After leaving a public place;
  - Before putting on and after taking off one’s cloth face covering; and
  - After touching animals or pets.
- Consider installing mounted, touchless hand-sanitizer dispensers throughout the fire house and/or ambulance quarters.
- Hand sanitizers should contain at least 60% ethyl alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol. CDC information here: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html).
- Encourage members to treat each room and area of the fire house and/or ambulance quarter as a separate area and use hand sanitizer before and after entering every room within the station to reduce risk of virus transmission.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily, ideally 2 times a day or more. The list of high-touch surfaces may include: tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, office space, desks, chairs, phones, keyboards, sinks, faucets, toilets, remote controls, work out/gym equipment, locker room doors/handles, refrigerator handles, stove knobs, bed rails, and digital two-way portable radios.
  - Be sure to wipe down and clean surfaces that are dirty and then use a household disinfectant. Most common EPA-Registered household disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) will work. For a complete list visit: [www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19](http://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19)
  - For electronics, such as tablets, touch screen, keyboards, and remote controls, consider putting a wipeable cover and wiping it down. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for cleaning and disinfecting. If no guidance is provided, use alcohol-based wipes or spray and dry surface thoroughly.
  - Develop protocol to ensure regular cleaning and disinfection of equipment and commonly used surfaces.
- Members should avoid entering rooms or living quarters unless it is necessary. Encourage members to use virtual communication and check-ins (phone, facetime or video chat), as appropriate.



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- Consider alternative means of communication such as having meetings outside with 6-foot physical distancing.
- If a meeting must take place in person indoors, plan the seating to ensure a minimum of 6 feet between participants. Place signs (*Sit here / Do not sit here or mark an "X"*) for seating to ensure there's ample space and limit the number of members to less than 10.

#### **SPECIFIC INFECTION PREVENTION STRATEGIES IN COMMON SPACES**

It is important that members are cautious of how they interact with each other on a daily basis.

- Common spaces: Encourage members to be flexible and inform of alternative activities, cancelled activities, or closed areas. If there are stairwells, consider going one at a time. Provide one-way directions, and other ways to enter and exit the building safely. Here are the following recommendations:
  - Eat in separate rooms, if possible, or stagger/schedule meal periods or stagger/schedule meal periods so that diners can stay at least 6 feet apart at all times.
  - Limit the number of members in the kitchen and communal dining area.
  - Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, or eating utensils .
  - Wash dishes with dish soap and hot water or use a dishwasher.
  - Use disposable utensils, if available.
  - Sink areas may be an infection source: avoid placing toothbrushes on countertops.
  - Use every other sink to allow space for physical distancing. A barrier such as plexiglass can be placed in between sinks to reduce exposure.
  - Back packs/totes should not be placed on countertops or bathroom surfaces. If they are, clean and disinfect the surface immediately.
  - Encourage the prompt removal of boots/shoes; wipe them down and consider placing them inside a personal belongings bag.
  - Place soiled clothes, uniforms, and other laundry in a personal belongings bag before laundering.
  - Launder clothing, uniform, towels, bedding and other items according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water settings and dry items completely. Encourage the use of wearing disposable gloves when handling dirty laundry. Be mindful not to shake dirty laundry.
  - If possible, consider washing one's own laundry instead of washing it with other members' items.
  - Remove gloves once laundry is set and wash hands immediately.
  - Encourage bedding, linen, and pillowcases to be covered or placed in a bag before storing or placing items in the members' respective lockers (keeping in mind that other members also sleep on the same bed for different shifts).
  - Wipe down the bed rails with an appropriate cleaner and disinfectant prior to placing new bedding, pillows, and blankets.
  - In shared sleeping areas (dormitories), ensure there is a physical distance of at least 6 feet

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between individuals, and place a partition or barrier if needed. Keep in mind that in the event of a fire or disaster, it should be easily removed.

- Consider opening windows, garages and doors to increase air circulation and ventilation.

#### **FIREHOUSE/AMBULANCE QUARTERS CLEANING**

It is important for members to be aware of proper cleaning procedures.

- When cleaning the firehouse/ambulance stations, ensure members are trained on appropriate use of cleaning and disinfection.
  - Encourage the use of PPE (gloves/gown/mask/face shield) to prevent splashing and contamination. Remove PPE carefully to avoid the spread of infectious material and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds, especially when hands are visibly soiled, dirty. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available and ensure that it contains at least 60% alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol.
  - Decontaminate the entire fire station and/or ambulance quarters with an effective disinfectant every time a member is tested positive with COVID-19.
- Consider the following recommendations when vacuuming:
  - Vacuum carpets and rugs. Wipe down floors, curtains and drapes with appropriate cleaning solutions.
  - Encourage vacuuming space if needed with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter, if available.
  - Encourage people to leave a living space before vacuuming (vacuum when space is empty, at night, after live meetings etc.).
  - While vacuuming, consider turning off room fans and central HVAC system, so that particles that escape from vacuum will not circulate throughout the firehouse/ambulance quarters.

#### **DAILY MONITORING AND RISK REDUCTION**

Provider agencies should implement risk reduction procedures to reduce infection.

- Educate and notify the supervisor if a member becomes ill and provide clear instructions if they develop COVID-19 symptoms (including, fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle/body aches, headache, new loss of taste and smell, congestion, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea).
- Incorporate a non-punitive departmental policy and make it available for everyone in the event a member is out sick (self-isolate/quarantine).
- Encourage testing of members and work with department's risk manager and human resources coordinator (return to work policy).
- Discourage any type of visitation at the firehouses and ambulance station. If a visitor/contract worker is scheduled to provide an essential service, jot down the person's full name, and contact information, and log in signs/symptoms. Ensure the individual is not ill and is aware of the masking, physical distancing and hand hygiene protocols in place.
- If an outbreak/cluster occurs within the firehouse and/or ambulance station, and most of the workforce is out, consider cohorting (grouping) of members into the same working schedule and

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other members (new) to another schedule, if feasible. Have a separate, dedicated restroom, sink, shower, lounge area for each cohort, to maximize the time and distance apart between members who were exposed to the positive cases from new members who were not directly exposed to the positive cases.

- Consider developing a checklist for cleaning, especially high touched surfaces, and nominate a “Firemen/Captain/Crew Coordinator/Chief Champion” of different aspects of hygiene to encourage accountability amongst all members.
- Post signage in the entrances and various rooms of the fire stations, including the living quarter, dining area, and gym. The signages are placed as a reminder for all members to continue to be vigilant and adhere to all best practices in order to prevent outbreaks in their firehouse and ambulance quarters.

#### REFERENCES:

[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/shared-congregate-house/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/shared-congregate-house/index.html)

[dhs.lacounty.gov/wps/portal/dhs/ems/emergipress/CE11](http://dhs.lacounty.gov/wps/portal/dhs/ems/emergipress/CE11)

