

Coronavirus: Safety forces taking extra precautions during COVID-19 pandemic

Lou Whitmire, Mansfield News Journal Published 6:09 p.m. ET March 20, 2020 | Updated 2:20 a.m. ET March 21, 2020

First responders wearing masks, following CDC guidelines

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Springfield Township Fire Station on Lexington-Springmill Road has posted a sign that firefighters advise residents to follow. (Photo: Lou Whitmire/News Journal)

MANSFIELD - Safety forces are taking added precautions due to coronavirus concerns to protect others and themselves.

Assistant Mansfield fire Chief Jim Bishop said firefighters are wearing PPEs, or personal protective equipment, more so now than in the past for extra safety.

As of Friday, the United States had 15,219 COVID-19 cases in all 50 states plus Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. There have been 201 deaths — including one in Lucas County, the first in Ohio. Ohio had 169 confirmed cases in 28 counties, with 39 people hospitalized, the Ohio Department of Health reported Friday.

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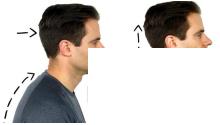
County.

"N95 masks which conform to your face. We're wearing them anytime we have a patient with respiratory issues," Bishop said. "We're also putting the regular masks on patients we transport. We're trying to limit the exposure."

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Bishop said the department is trying to be cognizant of what's going on around them.

"We're limiting the exposure and we're trying to have one person make the contact and have continuity of contact throughout the (squad) call," Bishop said. "For instance when the squad gets there, you have a driver and a medic on the truck. One of them will make contact and that person will stay in contact with the person (patient) throughout the call. They'll be in the back of the truck with them. We try to limit the driver's involvement where we can."

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Springfield Township fire Chief Matt Carey said he has dealt with tornadoes and floods in the past and has made directives and commands and sat down with his staff to go over coronavirus concerns.

"We've done a lot of meetings with the county with most of the fire chiefs, OhioHealth and our medical director and 911, which is going to have instructions so we know how to proceed. If we think it's someone who might have the virus or a 'person under investigation,' we'll use our flow sheet if it comes out through 911. If we get called for a sick person or a person with the flu, we're going to act like they have the virus."

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"The reason why we're doing that is there is a short supply of N95 masks. We're actively searching for them. We have P100 respirators, that's the rating it blocks. We have some P100 masks. We have 14. We're trying to get some more so everyone on the fire department has one," he said. "As a backup we'll put N95 masks on patients," he added.

He said he has reached out to other departments to see what they are doing.

"For example, the City of Worthington, the City of Columbus, we looked at some of their things, to see what best practices were out there," he said.

Carey said he is watching the daily afternoon press conferences by Gov. Mike DeWine.

"Our biggest concern is our employees. We don't want them sick or we're going to have trouble staffing," he said. "We still have to respond to all the fire and EMS calls. My concern is making sure everything is hashed out and done before something happens and we don't have to worry," Carey said.

"W

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en to put masks on people. We put training together and we want to make sure

Carey said he shared all the training information on a Google drive so everyone has access to the information at both fire stations.

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Mansfield firefighters and EMS personnel are wearing N95 protective masks available at stores including Lowe's and Home Depot due to coronavirus concerns. Patients being transported by squad are given regular paper masks for added protection for everyone. (Photo: Lou Whitmire/News Journal)

Capt. Don Zehner of the Richland County Sheriff's Office said his deputies are trying to stay six feet away from people when possible.

"We're handling personal thefts, routine calls by phone just to be courteous and safe to each side," he said.

He said deputies are disinfecting their cruisers at the beginning and end of their shifts and periodically during their shifts if necessary," Zehner said. "We have rubber gloves, masks and gowns if it would be needed," he added.

"Every day is changing and we're working to be ready for whatever tomorrow brings," he said.

Mansfield assistant police Chief Joe Petrycki said each cruiser is being disinfected at shift change and the department is working to acquire N95 respirator masks.

"We're trying to get some more. They are in short supply and we're trying to use the social distancing on calls. For reports we can take over the phone, we're doing that. Unfortunately there is going to be times we have to go in people's homes and depending on what the call for service is," he said.

"We're doing wash your hands, not touching your face, following the CDC and ODH and Richland Public Health guidelines. We are in daily contact with Richland Public Health," Petrycki said. "We're hoping the public cooperates with the mandates that come out of the governor's office and the Ohio Dept.

r and to do their part and even to reduce it in the coming weeks."

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To protect yourself from exposure

- **If possible, maintain a distance of at least 6 feet.**
- **Practice proper hand hygiene.** Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available and illicit drugs are NOT suspected to be present, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Have a trained Emergency Medical Service/Emergency Medical Technician (EMS/EMT) assess and transport anyone you think might have COVID-19 to a healthcare facility.
- Ensure only trained personnel wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) have contact with individuals who have or may have COVID-19.
- Learn your employer's plan for exposure control and participate in all-hands training on the use of PPE for respiratory protection, if available.



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Recommended Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Law enforcement who must make contact with individuals confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19 should follow CDC's Interim Guidance for EMS. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-for-ems.html>. Different styles of PPE may be necessary to perform operational duties. These alternative styles (i.e., coveralls) must provide protection that is at least as great as that provided by the minimum amount of PPE recommended.

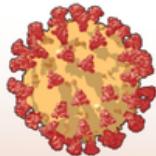
- The minimum PPE recommended is:
- A single pair of disposable examination gloves,
 - Disposable isolation gown or single-use/disposable coveralls*,
 - Any NIOSH-approved particulate respirator (i.e., N-95 or higher-level respirator), and
 - Eye protection (i.e., goggles or disposable face shield that fully covers the front and sides of the face).

*If unable to wear a disposable gown or coveralls because it limits access to duty belt and gear, ensure duty belt and gear are disinfected after contact with individual.

If close contact occurred during apprehension

- Clean and disinfect duty belt and gear prior to reuse using a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the product label.
- Follow standard operating procedures for the containment and disposal of used PPE.
- Follow standard operating procedures for containing and laundering clothes. Avoid shaking the clothes.

For law enforcement personnel performing daily routine activities, the immediate health risk is considered low. Law enforcement leadership and personnel should follow CDC's Interim General Business Guidance. Search "Interim Guidance for Businesses" on www.cdc.gov.

For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

Law enforcement guidelines from the Center for Disease Control provided by Ohio Highway Patrol regarding coronavirus concerns. (Photo: Submitted)

Sgt. Ryan Purpura , a spokesman for the Ohio Highway Patrol, said troopers are following the guidelines of the Ohio Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

"We're being cautious like everybody else and washing our hands," he said.

"No masks. Everybody has hand sanitizer and cleaning our cruisers and taking the extra steps so we don't get it and not spread it around," Purpura said.

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