

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK



7 Best Practices to Reduce COVID-19 Exposure

These best practices, which help minimize COVID-19 exposure at the fire station while responding to calls, off duty and at union halls, are also highlighted in the IAFF [COVID-19: Guidance for Fire Departments and Union Operations](#).

1. Facemasks

The IAFF strongly recommends wearing a face mask when feasible to prevent transmission of COVID-19 – not only for your protection but the protection of all our brothers and sisters and immediate family members. [Best practices](#) include wearing a surgical mask (cloth mask if there is a shortage of surgical masks) while on duty in the fire station and when in public, as well as when riding in fire apparatus together. It is also recommended that members wear a surgical mask (or cloth mask) while off duty, especially in circumstances where social distancing cannot be maintained or when using mass transit. Surgical masks should be disposed of after each use, and cloth face masks should be laundered frequently.

When on EMS calls, properly don and doff the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) while treating Persons Under Investigation or confirmed COVID-19 patients to include N95 or higher respirator, gloves, impervious gown, goggles or full-face shield.

2. Self Screening

The IAFF recommends all fire fighters/emergency medical personnel be vigilant about symptom monitoring twice daily, including temperature checks (both on shift and off shift) to identify symptoms early and prevent exposures. These recommendations should be followed whether you have been exposed to a positive COVID-19 patient or not. See the IAFF [video on symptom monitoring](#) and follow the [IAFF Self Screening Guidelines](#). If you are sick or have a fever – STAY HOME! Follow your department protocols when reporting sick.

3. Social Distance

When on duty, it is important to minimize close contact with others by practicing social distance (maintain 6 feet or greater separation when possible) from other members, including in sleeping quarters, and avoid congregating in common areas. The CDC now defines a close contact as exposure within 6 feet of an infected individual for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. The IAFF recommends placing signs throughout the station to remind members to keep their distance or limit the amount of people in a certain room at one time. This includes the kitchen table and bathrooms.

4. Hand Hygiene

Gross-decontaminating gear at the fireground has become a common and acceptable practice and, with the spread of COVID-19, we want practicing good hand hygiene to become a just as common and acceptable practice. The IAFF strongly supports these efforts and recommends departments post hand-washing signs throughout the

fire station and apparatus (e.g. apparatus bays, kitchen, the cab of the engine and ambulance, hallways, bathrooms, etc.). Additionally, having hand sanitizer readily available offers not only the reminder to clean your hands, but the convenience of a more frequent practice.

5. Decontaminate station, equipment and apparatus

It is equally important to decontaminate surfaces that are frequently touched to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Properly decontaminate all equipment to include apparatus, equipment, stations, phones, desks, computer keyboards, doorknobs, tables and other contact surfaces using an [EPA-approved disinfectant](#). Areas frequently touched should be decontaminated several times a day, especially at shift-changes.

6. Exposure Protocols

To prevent exposure or limit the spread of COVID-19 and to assist with work-related coverage, it is important that departments educate and promote protocols to document COVID-19 exposures. This may include access to a department-supported quarantine/isolation facility, contact tracing in place to notify members if there is an exposure, risk assessment criteria and return-to-work guidelines. Make sure you document all potential exposures according to department protocols and using the [NFORS Exposure Tracker](#).

[Risk Assessment for Potential Exposure](#)

[Post-Exposure/Quarantine Symptom Monitoring Tracker](#)

[Review the IAFF Return to Work guidelines](#)

7. Union Offices and Union Halls

Affiliate leaders and Health and Safety Committee teams should assess both the union office and union halls to minimize potential COVID-19 exposure and subsequent infection. Similar to the fire station, face masks, social distancing, minimizing the number of members in the office or hall at one time, signage and having hand-sanitizer readily available are all good and common-sense initiatives to promote and put in place. We would also encourage affiliate leaders to have a temperature station and issue a disposable face mask to members and visitors who enter without one, thus making the union office safe and healthy for everyone.

Investing in personal hand sanitizers to distribute at meetings and having the sanitizer available at the union office for members encourages and promotes sanitizing hands early and often. Encourage and promote face masks at meetings, negotiations, grievances and when conversing with elected officials.