

# Multnomah County Law Enforcement Update

## COVID-19 LAW ENFORCEMENT FAQs

### How is COVID-19 spread?

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the mouths, eyes, or noses of people who are nearby, spread by hand contact, or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

### How can I protect myself while on duty?

The main source of transmission is through small droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. If you are able, maintain a 6-foot distance from the subject you are interacting with.

- **If I am arresting someone who is visibly ill, what should I do?** If they are exhibiting symptoms, placing a procedure or dust mask, if available, on the subject voluntarily should keep droplets from spreading. If the subject is combative, a spit sock may be used in accordance with use of force policies.
  - **Eye protection** is also recommended when dealing with a symptomatic subject. Goggles that create a seal around the eyes are optimal, but in the absence of goggles, good wrap around eyewear similar to range safety glasses will work better than no protection for your eyes. Wash your eyewear with soap and water and completely dry after your contact with the symptomatic person.
  - **Use nitrile gloves** when handling subjects as the other hazards beyond COVID-19 are still of concern.
  - **After having contact** with a symptomatic person, refrain from touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Wash your hands and any other exposed areas thoroughly with soap and warm water. Use a hand sanitizer in lieu of washing until you can get to soap and water.
- **If you are dealing with a subject who is NON-SYMPTOMATIC**, you are not required to use PPE. Remember, there may be difficulties in ordering/obtaining PPE in large quantities, so please use the PPE only when you deem necessary.



## What should be done during transport?

If you are transporting a symptomatic (cough, shortness of breath, fever) subject in the patrol car, lowering passenger windows to increase air flow is good for decreasing chances of transmission.

## How should patrol cars be cleaned after a transport of a symptomatic person?

It's unclear exactly how long COVID-19 can remain on a surface. Early evidence suggests that the virus can survive for several days at room temperature. This is why wiping down and cleaning commonly touched surfaces helps to prevent the spread of illnesses like COVID-19 and the flu. Clean and disinfect the vehicle in accordance with standard operating procedures. All surfaces that may have come in contact with the subject or materials contaminated during transport of persons should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected using an EPA-registered hospital grade disinfectant in accordance with the product label. Products such as Cavicide or Total Green Nutriclean are good to use. 1-10% bleach (not permitted in the jail) solution can be used for prisoner transport seating areas. Check your disinfectant products that have notations of working on coronaviruses (COVID-19 isn't the first coronavirus we have dealt with.)

## How should I clean my uniforms?

Uniforms should be laundered as usual. If you have external gear that has been exposed, wiping or spraying external gear with a 60-70% alcohol solution should be sufficient to kill viruses.

## What can law enforcement do to protect themselves and their families and friends when they go home?

Prior to going home, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water. Consider washing your face as well. If possible, have clean civilian clothes at your work location to change into prior to going home. If you must wear uniform gear home, change prior to having close personal contact with your family members, especially if you have very young, elderly, or family members with compromised immune systems at home.



## If a patient has died of COVID-19, are they still able to transmit disease?

If you go on a death investigation call, continue to practice PPE use to prevent you from contact hazards with the body (e.g. gloves when handling the deceased and/or belongings). However, since COVID-19 is transmitted primarily through droplets spread in close contact, the deceased should not pose a threat as they will not be coughing or sneezing. If there are family members present who need to be interviewed, and the family members/witnesses are symptomatic, practice the precautions of using space, have the person wear a mask, etc. Also, communicate with the responding Deputy Medical Examiner regarding the situation. Continue to follow death investigation protocols regarding handling the deceased.

## Do officers need procedure masks for patrol cars?

You do not need to be wearing a mask for routine patrol or contact with people who are non-symptomatic. Increasing personal space (as we normally do for safe contact distance) will aid in decreasing the chances of community spread. If a person has symptoms or is coughing, it is best to have them wear a mask to avoid coughing droplets towards you.

## If I respond to a scene and fire is suited up in level B, what are the recommendations for law enforcement?

Continue to maintain distance from a symptomatic subject as much as possible. Have eye, mouth, and hand protection, if possible. Remember that if you need to assist Fire/EMS with a combative subject, you are helping to mitigate the risk to Fire/EMS and the general public. Your risk related to brief direct contact to get the subject into a position of control should be a lesser concern. Your decisions regarding engagement to control a subject when needed should not be altered by COVID-19. Have a spit sock available to use prior to engagement if needed.



## When I leave a scene, what steps do I need to do to decon?

Thorough hand washing. Clean anything the subject had direct contact with such as your patrol car seat area, handcuffs, etc. If you believe your uniform was exposed to droplets, change uniforms and launder the exposed clothing. Remember, warm water and soap and the normal disinfectants we normally use are adequate for protection.

## What will happen if we get more cases in Oregon and this becomes widespread?

Follow the guidance of public health authorities. If you become ill, please stay home. If you are not ill, continue to maintain distance between yourself and the subject (6 feet when possible), continue to practice good hygiene with handwashing and avoid face touching, and use PPE mentioned above when available and when you think is necessary. Since we are all essential employees, prepare your families for contingencies for child care and other home concerns in cases where schools or daycare facilities close.

## What is social distancing?

Social distancing means remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible.



# Good reminders!

- Stay home if you feel ill.
- Flu is still circulating in the community. Get a flu shot if you haven't done so already
- Practice good hand hygiene by [washing your hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Law enforcement can mask (spit or procedure mask) the person they are working with
- Cover eyes, nose, and mouth when working with an ill subject. Use a mask with a face shield or other eye protection, if possible.
- Outdoor exposures are lower risk
- When transporting subjects, roll down windows to allow air circulation
- Stay informed
  - [multco.us/covid19](https://multco.us/covid19),
  - [Oregon Health Authority's COVID-19 FAQ page](#)  
[Center for Disease Control](#) COVID-19 webpage for latest news.

---

**This guidance applies to law enforcement who anticipate close contact with persons with confirmed or possible COVID-19 in the course of their work. This FAQ will continue to be updated as more information is available, but this should give you some basic knowledge of the COVID-19 virus and serve as a guide for staff possibly working around potential symptomatic persons.**

