

Federal Healthcare Resilience Task Force

EMS/Prehospital Team

BURNOUT, SELF-CARE & COVID-19 EXPOSURE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

Product (EMS17A) Purpose

First responders are on the front-lines of our nation's response to COVID-19. The challenges they face are immense and the toll of their work on their mental health can be significant. This document contains suggestions to help first responders cope during the COVID-19 pandemic

Developed By

The Federal Healthcare Resilience Task Force (HRTF) is leading the development of a comprehensive strategy for the U.S. healthcare system to facilitate resiliency and responsiveness to the threats posed by COVID-19. The Task Force's EMS/Pre-Hospital Team is comprised of public and private-sector Emergency Medical Service (EMS) and 911 experts from a wide variety of agencies and focuses on responding to the needs of the pre-hospital community. This Team is composed of subject matter experts from NHTSA Office of EMS, CDC, FEMA, USFA, US Army, USCG, and non-federal partners representing stakeholder groups and areas of expertise. Through collaboration with experts in related fields, the team develops practical resources for field providers, supervisors, administrators, medical directors and associations to better respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Intended Audience

Federal, as well as State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Government (SLTT) EMS, FD, and 911 agencies.

Expected Distribution Mechanism

EMS.gov webpage, 911.gov webpage, EMS/911 GOVdelivery, USFA webpage, USFA GOVdelivery and USFA social media, Stakeholder Calls, EMS stakeholder organization's membership distribution, Email mechanisms.

USG Agency/ Program Consulted During Drafting

Members of the team were from FEMA, OEMS, and USFA.

Primary Point of Contact

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Signs of Burnout & Stress

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov), first responders may experience burnout and secondary traumatic stress during prolonged exposure to emergencies.

- Burnout – feelings of extreme exhaustion and being overwhelmed.
- Secondary traumatic stress – stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual’s traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event.

Recognize the signs of both of these conditions in yourself and other responders to be sure those who need a break or need help can address these needs. Selected signs are shown below:

Signs of Burnout	Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress
Sadness, depression, or apathy	Excessive worry or fear about something bad happening
Feeling like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A failure • Nothing you can do will help • You are not doing your job well • You need alcohol/other drugs to cope 	Feeling easily startled, or “on guard” all of the time
	Having nightmares or recurrent thoughts about the traumatic situation

Learn more and view the full list of signs at <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>

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Tips for First Responder Self-Care

Coping techniques like taking breaks, eating healthy foods, exercising, and using the buddy system can help prevent and reduce burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

The CDC recommends:

- Taking breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Taking care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Making time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connecting with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. (This can be done while maintaining social distance).

Learn more at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

What to do if you've been exposed to a confirmed or suspected COVID patient and/or staff member:

Follow CDC's [Follow-up and/or Reporting Measures by EMS Clinicians After Caring for a PUI or Patient with Confirmed COVID-19](#)

To protect the people in your household, you may need to practice social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines these terms as:

- Social distancing is a way to keep people from interacting closely or frequently enough to spread an infectious disease.
- Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. It lasts long enough to ensure the person has not contracted an infectious disease.
- Isolation prevents the spread of an infectious disease by separating people who are sick from those who are not. It lasts as long as the disease is contagious.

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Learn more and read tips for taking care of your behavioral health during an infectious disease outbreak at <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Taking-Care-of-Your-Behavioral-Health-During-an-Infectious-Disease-Outbreak/sma14-4894>

Read CDC guidance on Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Homes and Residential Communities at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html#precautions>

Other Resources:

CDC's [Interim Guidance for Emergency Medical Services \(EMS\) Systems and 911 Public Safety Answering Points \(PSAPs\) for COVID-19 in the United States](#)

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD's [Managing Healthcare Workers' Stress Associated with the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak](#).

SAMHSA's [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) (Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746)

Mental and Behavioral Health COVID-19 (PHE.gov). [A collection of mental and behavioral health resources for COVID-19](#).

911 Training Institute. To help 911 professionals cope with extraordinary new stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 911 Training Institute has produced a short video series called "Sustaining 911 Resilience During COVID-19". Please visit the following link to view the video series: <https://bit.ly/34l66lk> *.

NENA Health & Wellness Resources: <https://www.nena.org/page/covid19> *.

NAEMT Mental Health Resources: <http://www.naemt.org/initiatives/ems-mental-health> *.

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