

Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic: *What Police Learned from One of the Most Challenging Periods of Our Lives*



POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

CRITICAL ISSUES IN POLICING SERIES

Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic:

What Police Learned from One of the Most Challenging Periods of Our Lives

December 2021



POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

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Message from PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler

Dear colleagues,

In October 2007, PERF released a Critical Issues in Policing report called *Police Planning for an Influenza Pandemic: Case Studies and Recommendations from the Field*.

At the time, it didn't seem like a typical PERF report. What did medical issues have to do with policing? So in my introduction, I felt a need to explain why we produced the report:

Why would a flu pandemic be a police problem, as opposed to a public health problem? There are several reasons: Police may be called upon to enforce quarantines, to provide security in hospitals swamped with patients, and to ensure that vaccines—when they became available in limited quantities—could be delivered to those with the greatest need for them.

But perhaps the biggest reason why a flu pandemic would be a police problem lies in the answer to this question: Whenever anything bad happens, who do people call? The local public health agency? How many people even know the name of their public health agency, much less its phone number? When bad things happen, people call the police.

There was nothing like our 2007 report. It had 111 pages of detailed information, including four case studies of far-sighted police departments (in Fairfax County, VA; Toronto; Overland Park, KS; and London) that had prepared for the exact type of scenario that the world would face 13 years later, with COVID-19.

Fast forward to March 2020. The world was just starting to come to grips with the fact that we might be facing a pandemic that could change everyone's lives. PERF's 2007 report was the only report available to police agencies about steps they should begin taking to deal with the crisis. In fact, during the entire period of the pandemic, I've kept a copy of our report on my desk.

At PERF, my staff recognized the importance of what was happening with COVID-19. We believed that the most important thing we could do for the policing profession at that time was to gather information about the police response to COVID from all over the country and the world, *and get the information out to the field quickly*, usually the next day.

So we made a decision to issue a "Daily COVID-19 Report" every working day on the developing national emergency. We didn't know how long the pandemic would last. But as the months went by, we never had any difficulty finding new aspects of the pandemic to cover, or new people to interview.

One of the first outbreaks that grabbed the United States' attention was in Kirkland, WA, where at least 26 people had died of COVID in a single nursing home. (That death toll later increased to 37.) So I called Cherie Harris, the police chief in Kirkland, and asked her about what was happening, and importantly, what she was doing to ensure that COVID would not sweep through her department the way it did in the nursing home.

To her great credit, Chief Harris already had a detailed written plan that she shared with us, with systems for COVID-testing of her officers, use of



personal protective equipment, sanitizing procedures at police facilities and the jail, changes in response to calls for service to minimize spread of the virus between officers and community members, return-to-work protocols, and statistical information.

My interview with Chief Harris was featured in PERF's first "Daily COVID-19 Report."

Over the coming year, we produced approximately 120 Daily COVID-19 Reports, all of which are available online at www.policeforum.org/covid-19-response. (See the sidebar on page 4 for a list of these reports, to get a sense of the issues we covered and the experts we interviewed.)

Our reports were not summaries of news media articles; they were original research and reporting. Mostly, we interviewed police chiefs, sheriffs, mayors, public health officials, and other experts from across the United States, and also from England, Scotland, Israel, Italy, Canada, and other locations.

Every morning at 10:30, a core group of about seven of us at PERF would have a meeting to plan the next few days' worth of Daily COVID-19 Reports. We felt like newspaper reporters and editors, bouncing ideas off each other and developing plans for interviewing sources, gathering information, and writing up our results on tight deadlines. I called this group the 10:30 Team.

(Later, on May 25, 2020, the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis resulted in another national crisis, with hundreds of protests and civil disturbances across the nation, calls for reform measures, and related issues. So we launched a similar set of more than 130 daily reports, known as the Daily Critical Issues Reports, available here: <https://www.policeforum.org/critical-issues-reports>.)

The police response to COVID is a remarkable story

The report you are holding tells a great story of how police departments across the United States and around the world had to adapt their own tactics and policies and then respond to evolving community outbreaks.

I think it's remarkable how well police and sheriffs' departments responded to the pandemic, especially during the first critical weeks, when few people understood how long it might last and how it would impact our daily lives. Police chiefs and sheriffs didn't

wait until we had all the answers. They quickly recognized the threats and dealt with them immediately.

Our earliest Daily Reports show that within weeks, police were doing things like:

- **Changing their shift schedules** in order to minimize officers' contacts with each other;
- Finding other ways to **reduce person-to-person contacts**, such as holding roll calls outdoors or online;
- Announcing new ways of **responding to non-emergency calls** from the public online or by phone, but also finding new ways to stay in touch with their communities, largely through the use of technology;
- **Helping officers and their families cope** with the new stresses of COVID, including officers who had to quarantine following a possible COVID exposure and officers who became ill.
- Finding ways to **help vulnerable populations**, such as elderly persons living alone and persons experiencing homelessness;
- **Preparing for increases in domestic violence calls** resulting from COVID-related stresses and abusers spending more time at home;
- Finding new ways to **engage their communities** during a time of social distancing;
- Communicating with **vulnerable immigrant communities**;
- Encouraging compliance and enforcing **mask mandates and other public health orders**;
- **Preventing hate crimes** against Asian-Americans.

Police faced increasingly difficult issues over the months to come. Governors began announcing stay-at-home orders, restrictions on public gatherings, requirements that people wear masks when using grocery stores and other essential services, and other rules designed to reduce the spread of COVID and save lives. The delicate and complex task of ensuring compliance with these orders often fell to local law enforcement.

Overall, a historian reading this report and our Daily COVID-19 Reports could conclude that American police agencies and sheriffs' offices were very adaptive and quick-moving in protecting the public during this unprecedented crisis.

Police showed great creativity and resourcefulness in finding ways to reduce COVID-related harms to their communities. At the same time, police were able to prevent COVID from sweeping through their departments to an extent that could have compromised public safety.

Acknowledgments

I'm grateful to all the police chiefs, sheriffs, other law enforcement personnel, and other experts whom I interviewed over the past year about how COVID was affecting their agencies, what they were doing about it, and which strategies were proving most effective. I never had a police chief or sheriff tell me "Sorry, I'm too busy," even though I'm certain they were very busy.

I'm also thankful to the Motorola Solutions Foundation. I've always said that what is truly special about PERF's relationship with Motorola is that the Foundation gives PERF the freedom to respond immediately to critical situations in policing. First, it was Motorola who supported PERF's 2007 report on the threat of pandemics. And the Motorola Solutions Foundation enabled PERF to conduct the research in this report and our Daily Reports. I am also grateful to the Howard G. Buffett Foundation for providing additional support for this project, and to Howard Buffett for his personal support in recognizing what a life-changing event the COVID pandemic would become.

I'm grateful to my friend Greg Brown, Motorola Solutions Chairman and CEO; Jack Molloy, Executive Vice President of Products and Sales; Jason Winkler, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer; Jim Mears, Senior Vice President; Tracy Kimbo, Chief of Staff, Global Enterprise and Channels; Monica Mueller, Vice President of Government Affairs; Shamik Mukherjee, Chief Marketing Officer; Karem Perez, Executive Director of the Motorola Solutions Foundation; and Wesley Anne Barden, Manager of Evaluation and Grantmaking at the Foundation.

Many PERF staff members contributed to this project, including the core group who worked with me every day on the Daily Reports. The 10:30 Team included Chief Program Officer Kevin Morison; Tom Wilson, Director of PERF's Center for Applied Research and Management; and Communications

Director Craig Fischer, who were involved every day, suggesting topics for new reports and editing the drafts. Kevin and Craig also did the final editing of this report.

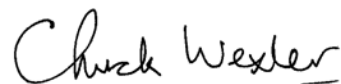
Special credit goes to three people on the 10:30 Team:

- My Executive Assistant **Soline Simenauer** did the essential work of calling the chiefs and other experts we wanted to interview, and finding times when they could all get on a conference call with me.
- Assistant Director of Communications **James McGinty** wrote the first draft of nearly all of the reports, almost always on a tight deadline. Often we would interview several experts on a topic in the late afternoon, and James somehow was able to transcribe and organize the interviews into a Daily Report within a couple hours. The Team then would quickly make any edits, and James would set up the final version that night on PERF's membership database, so it could be emailed to PERF members and the news media at 7:00 the next morning.
- **Sarah Mostyn** drafted this Critical Issues in Policing report. Sarah also oversaw the development and analysis of several pandemic-related surveys that PERF conducted.

Many other PERF staffers contributed their expertise on various COVID-related topics. PERF Summer Associate Madeleine Smith assisted with organizing and outlining this report, and Dave Williams designed and laid out this publication.

I hope you will find this report useful as you prepare for what lies ahead with COVID-19 pandemic and related issues.

Best,



Chuck Wexler
Executive Director
Police Executive Research Forum
Washington, D.C.

PERF Daily COVID Reports

Following is a list of PERF's Daily COVID-19 Reports. **Click on each title to see the full reports.** All Daily COVID-19 Reports are available at <https://www.policeforum.org/covid-19-response>.

2020

- Tuesday, March 17: Interview with Kirkland, WA Chief Cherie Harris
- Wednesday, March 18: Adjusting work schedules and suspending roll calls
- Thursday, March 19: Interviews with police executives
- Friday, March 20: Limiting in-person police responses
- Monday, March 23: Interviews with police executives, and officer wellness resources
- Tuesday, March 24: Addressing officer safety concerns and changes to training programs
- Wednesday, March 25: Interviews with sheriffs about reducing jail populations and protecting deputies
- Thursday, March 26: Interviews with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea, First Deputy Commissioner Benjamin Tucker, and Chief of Department Terry Monahan
- Friday, March 27: Interviews with Florida chiefs and sheriffs
- Monday, March 30: The impact of COVID-19 on persons experiencing homelessness
- Tuesday, March 31: Interviews with sheriffs about jails and officer wellness
- Wednesday, April 1: Interviews with Aurora, IL Chief Kristen Ziman and Detroit Chief James Craig
- Thursday, April 2: Managing emergency communications centers
- Friday, April 3: Domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis
- Monday, April 6: Interviews with London Met Deputy Commissioner Stephen House and PSNI Chief Constable Simon Byrne
- Tuesday, April 7: Supporting and managing officers out sick
- Wednesday, April 8: Interviews with Canadian officials
- Thursday, April 9: Protecting elderly persons, and Miami PD heat maps
- Friday, April 10: Internal communications and new guidance from the CDC
- Monday, April 13: Staffing and scheduling
- Tuesday, April 14: Police use of masks
- Wednesday, April 15: The role of sergeants
- Thursday, April 16: Interview with Superintendent Micky Rosenfeld, National Spokesman to Foreign Media, Israel Police
- Friday, April 17: Interview with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea
- Monday, April 20: Police executives from California, Oregon, and Washington State discuss easing restrictions
- Tuesday, April 21: NYPD coronavirus report and interviews with Police Scotland Chief Constable Iain Livingstone and Miami Chief Jorge Colina
- Wednesday, April 22: Managing COVID demonstrations in state capitals
- Thursday, April 23: Officer wellness during the pandemic
- Friday, April 24: Engaging the community while social distancing
- Monday, April 27: Budget challenges in police departments and sheriffs offices
- Tuesday, April 28: Fraud and cybercrime during COVID-19
- Wednesday, April 29: Budget challenges in larger police departments
- Thursday, April 30: Interview with Italian Carabinieri Colonel Pietro Carrozza, commander of the Verona region
- Friday, May 1: Communicating with immigrant communities
- Monday, May 4: Police labor leaders discuss their concerns
- Tuesday, May 5: Reopening businesses in Georgia and South Carolina
- Wednesday, May 6: Challenges in California, Florida, and Texas beach towns
- Thursday, May 7: Hate crimes against Asian-Americans

- Friday, May 8: Interview with NYPD Deputy Commissioner John Miller
- Monday, May 11: Policing in COVID-19 hot spots
- Tuesday, May 12: How has the pandemic affected crime rates?
- Wednesday, May 13: Protests and civil disturbances in the COVID environment
- Thursday, May 14: Preparing for demonstrations and protests in big cities
- Friday, May 15: Updates from Yonkers, NY; Los Angeles; and Northern Italy
- Monday, May 18: Collaboration between police departments and sheriffs offices
- Tuesday, May 19: Interviews with Police Psychologist Dr. John Nicoletti and Castle Rock, CO Chief Jack Cauley
- Wednesday, May 20: Patrol officers share their experiences
- Thursday, May 21: How COVID-19 has impacted homicide investigations
- Friday, May 22: How public information officers' jobs have changed during the pandemic
- Tuesday, May 26: Taking over an agency in the midst of a pandemic
- Wednesday, May 27: Changes to training programs
- Thursday, May 28: How the pandemic has changed prosecutors' work
- Friday, May 29: Resuming some normal operations
- Wednesday, June 3: The pandemic's impact on data collection, analysis, and metrics
- Thursday, June 4: The intersection of COVID-19, demonstrations, and riots
- Friday, June 5: Using drones for COVID-related purposes
- Wednesday, June 10: Cities where COVID-19 has yet to peak
- Friday, June 12: The impact of COVID-19 on police recruitment and hiring practices
- Friday, June 19: Thoughts from PERF's Research Advisory Board
- Monday, June 29: Managing sharp increases in Texas and Arizona
- Wednesday, July 8: Chiefs in medium-size Texas cities discuss recent spikes
- Monday, July 20: Opioid overdoses during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Tuesday, July 21: Challenges for transit police during the pandemic
- Thursday, July 30: University police chiefs discuss school reopening plans
- Friday, July 31: Spikes in Omaha, Columbus, and Indianapolis
- Monday, August 3: How COVID-19 and defunding are impacting police budgets
- Tuesday, August 4: How COVID-19 has impacted training
- Thursday, August 6: School police chiefs discuss the upcoming academic year
- Tuesday, August 11: How the pandemic is affecting hurricane emergency management
- Wednesday, August 12: The impact of the pandemic on airport police
- Friday, August 21: How FirstNet has helped first responders during the pandemic and demonstrations
- Friday, September 4: Jail operations during the pandemic
- Friday, September 11: The impact of the pandemic on human trafficking
- Tuesday, September 15: Interview with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea about 9/11, COVID-19, and crime
- Wednesday, September 16: How has the pandemic affected speeding and traffic safety?
- Wednesday, September 23: Massachusetts chiefs discuss their response to the pandemic
- Thursday, September 24: Honolulu Chief Susan Ballard, Kauai Chief Todd Raybuck, and Miami-Dade Police Director Freddy Ramirez discuss enforcement of COVID regulations
- Friday, October 2: Update from Superintendent Micky Rosenfeld, National Spokesman to Foreign Media, Israel Police
- Wednesday, October 7: Wisconsin chiefs discuss their increase in cases
- Thursday, October 8: North Dakota and South Dakota police chiefs discuss the rise of COVID cases in their states
- Monday, October 19: Midwest university police chiefs discuss local COVID increases and students' return to campus

>> *continued on page 6*

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- Monday, October 26: COVID-19 and election preparations in Michigan
- Monday, November 9: Interview with Italian Carabinieri Colonel Pietro Carrozza
- Friday, November 13: COVID increases in Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas
- Monday, November 16: The police role in vaccine distribution
- Tuesday, November 17: Interviews with Kirkland, WA Chief Cherie Harris; Aurora, IL Chief Kristen Ziman; and Detroit Chief James Craig
- Friday, November 20: Use of reserve officers during the pandemic
- Monday, November 30: Interview with Denver Chief Paul Pazen about his agency's participation in the Moderna vaccine study
- Tuesday, December 1: Interview with San Diego County Sheriff William Gore about enforcing COVID public health orders
- Monday, December 7: The police response to homelessness during the pandemic
- Tuesday, December 8: Interview with NYPD Chief Terry Monahan; Phoenix, AZ Chief Jeri Williams; Providence, RI Chief Hugh Clements; and Hennepin County, MN Sheriff David Hutchinson
- Thursday, December 10: Interview with Yonkers, NY Police Commissioner John Mueller and Newark, NJ Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose
- Friday, December 11: Interview with Long Beach, CA Chief Robert Luna, Richmond, CA Chief Bisa French, and Santa Barbara, CA Capt. Marylinda Arroyo
- Monday, December 14: Interview with Seattle, WA Chief Adrian Diaz, Vancouver, WA Chief James McElvain, and Portland, OR Chief Chuck Lovell
- Tuesday, December 15: Interview with Corpus Christi, TX Chief Mike Markle, Austin, TX Assistant Chief Joseph Chacon, and Irving, TX Assistant Chief Darren Steele
- Wednesday, December 16: The role of analysts during the pandemic
- Thursday, December 17: Interview with Kansas City, MO Chief Rick Smith, Omaha, NE Chief Todd Schmaderer, and Sioux City, IA Chief Rex Mueller
- Friday, December 18: Security for vaccine transportation and distribution
- Monday, December 21: Survey: What police executives are expecting with coronavirus vaccines
- Tuesday, December 22: Interviews with agencies that will be requiring employees to take the vaccine
- Wednesday, December 23: Preventing and responding to vaccine-related fraud
- Tuesday, December 29: Vaccine distribution to agency personnel
- Wednesday, December 30: Policing New Year's Eve celebrations during the pandemic

2021

- Wednesday, January 6: University police prepare for the spring semester
- Friday, January 8: Interview with London Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Sir Steven House
- Tuesday, January 12: Interviews with Austin, TX Chief Brian Manley, Janesville, WI Chief David Moore, and New Castle County, DE Major Wendi Feeser about vaccine distribution
- Wednesday, January 13: Responding to the COVID surge in California
- Tuesday, January 19: Responding to the COVID surge in Arizona
- Wednesday, January 27: How police chaplains are supporting officers and civilian employees during the pandemic
- Monday, February 1: Interview with Dr. Kevin J. Strom from RTI International
- Thursday, February 4: Vaccinations in the Los Angeles Fire Department and the Israel Police
- Thursday, February 18: Recap of PERF's webinar about vaccinations
- Thursday, March 4: Addressing unanswered questions from the vaccine webinar
- Tuesday, March 9: Spring Break in Florida beach cities
- Monday, March 15: Managing large parties and violence in college towns
- Tuesday, March 16: Hate crimes and bias-related incidents against Asian-Americans

Executive Summary and Key Takeaways: The Police Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

THIS REPORT SUMMARIZES PERF'S FINDINGS from nearly 120 "Daily COVID-19 Reports" produced between March 17, 2020 and March 16, 2021,¹ along with additional research into how police departments and sheriffs' offices responded to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21.

The purpose of the report is not primarily historical. Rather, the report is intended to provide law enforcement agencies with continuing guidance on how to manage their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to other public health emergencies in the future.

Background: What Police Already Knew When COVID-19 Struck

Over the last 15 years, PERF has produced several reports² about the role of police in responding to public health emergencies, in particular *Police Planning for an Influenza Pandemic: Case Studies and Recommendations from the Field* (2007).

Related PERF reports include:

- *Law Enforcement Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies: An Executive Summary of the Resources Series* (2010)
- *A Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety for Law Enforcement Executives* (2010)

- *Benchmarks for Developing a Law Enforcement Pandemic Flu Plan* (2009)
- *Communication and Public Health Emergencies: A Guide for Law Enforcement* (2009)
- *The Role of Law Enforcement in Public Health Emergencies* (2006)

In PERF's 2007 report, the top recommendation was to start planning early for such an event. At the time, some agencies already were putting together response plans for influenza pandemics, because that was an emerging threat then. In 2009, this threat was realized with the H1N1 pandemic.

Thus, the role of police in responding to a pandemic was not an entirely foreign concept to law enforcement agencies when the first news of COVID-19 began to emerge. However, the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be of a magnitude not seen in the United States or globally since the 1918 flu pandemic. By March 2020, COVID-19 had fully progressed to community transmission, states began ordering lockdowns, and international travel had largely halted. Just 20 months later, more than 750,000 Americans had died from COVID-19, many businesses and schools had been shuttered for more than a year, and nearly all Americans had been negatively impacted by the pandemic in various ways.

1. PERF Daily COVID-19 Reports. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid-19-response>

2. Police Executive Research Forum. "Free Online Documents, Police & Public Health." <https://www.policeforum.org/online-documents-topic>

Maintaining Essential Services, While Avoiding Devastating Outbreaks Among Officers

Throughout the pandemic, communities nationwide continued to look to their police agencies for guidance and assistance. Police agencies and sheriffs' offices worked to respond to these public health needs.

At the same time, police had to modify their own daily work protocols in many ways to protect their personnel from the threat of COVID-19 infection. Because most police officers work out on the streets, in close contact with the public, they were at high risk of becoming infected.

Police and sheriffs' departments proved to be resilient, changing many of their systems and operations almost overnight in the early days of the pandemic, and continuing to adapt for a year or more as conditions changed.

This report summarizes the ways in which police agencies responded to the pandemic, and is intended to help agencies plan for potential future public health crises.

Key Takeaways Looking Forward

Based on the information we've gathered since March 2020, PERF has identified 15 key takeaways to guide agencies in the future:

1. Keep emergency and continuity of operations plans updated, and make sure you have adequate supplies of PPE and other equipment.

Agencies may not have the capacity or resources to develop detailed plans for every emergency situation, but having updated plans for your agency's emergency operations center and continuity of operations will provide a framework that can be adapted to any emerging situation. This process should include consideration of what supplies agencies should maintain. Face masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) were in significant demand at the

start of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in shortages nationwide. Agencies should consider what PPE they should stockpile, with an awareness that some may have a limited shelf life. Having these plans and supplies in place will put agencies in a better position to quickly respond to the situation.

2. Leaders should remain in frequent communication with agency personnel.

During any crisis, particularly those of a long duration, internal communications are essential. Police executives should have systems in place, such as intranet email systems and text alerts, to communicate directly with their personnel. During the pandemic, some chiefs have produced brief video messages that they send to all personnel to answer questions and address officers' concerns. Weekly messages from the chief or sheriff can be extremely helpful in reassuring and informing personnel during challenging times.

3. The safety and wellness of officers should be a guiding priority in how agencies respond to pandemic events.

Police agencies cannot help their communities if they don't take steps to keep their members safe and well. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an enormous toll on police officers, sheriffs' deputies, and professional staff of law enforcement agencies as they faced threats to their physical and mental well-being. Every day in the field, officers and deputies have risked potential exposure to COVID-19.

As of December 2021, more than 545 officers and deputies have lost their lives to COVID-19 in the line of duty.³

The possibility of bringing the virus to their families added to the mental toll on personnel. Agencies should recognize these impacts and include the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of officers and other employees in

3. Officer Down Memorial Page. "Honoring Officers Killed in 2021." <https://www.odmp.org/search/year?year=2021> "Honoring Officers Killed in 2020." <https://www.odmp.org/search/year?year=2020>

their planning and preparation for future pandemic events. In particular, agencies should:

- a. Have plans for adjusting policies and procedures to reduce the spread of illness among personnel. These include such issues as closing precinct stations to the public and shifting to one-officer patrol cars if possible.
- b. Ensure that existing wellness supports can be adapted to the needs of officers and deputies during pandemic events, such as making sure that peer counseling can be accessed virtually. Assistance also should meet the unique needs of the situation, such as providing care packages to personnel in quarantine.
- c. Ensure that family members of personnel can also access support as needed.

4. Be prepared to change staffing schedules and other systems immediately.

Given the contagious nature of COVID-19, officers and deputies operating in close contact were at an increased risk for catching and spreading the virus. This risks of contagion increased with the Delta and Omicron variants, which emerged in 2021.⁴ Agencies have had to balance the importance of social distancing with being able to have enough personnel to respond to public safety needs.

Many agencies quickly recognized the importance of being flexible with staffing schedules at the start of the pandemic, in an effort to avoid losing officers to sickness. Some agencies built a type of “quarantine” into their shift schedules, such as having officers work 7 days of 12-hour shifts, followed by 14 days off, to reduce the potential for person-to-person contacts. Some departments split shifts to avoid losing an entire unit in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak. For example, agencies had only half of a unit on duty at the same time, or they separated officers into cohorts, so officers from Cohort A would never come into contact with officers in Cohort B.

5. Ensure that communications and IT systems are up to date and can be adjusted on short notice.

Workplaces of every kind came to recognize the importance of having a robust IT infrastructure during the pandemic. To allow for social distancing, many police agencies allowed some personnel, such as detectives, crime analysts, and administrative personnel, to work remotely. But agencies had to ensure that individuals working remotely had the necessary equipment and access to department databases, and that security protections guarding sensitive data would be equally strong.

Having these kinds of technology in place before they are needed greatly eases the transition to remote work.

For example, when the COVID pandemic began, a number of agencies already had backup 9-1-1 call centers that had been built to maintain 9-1-1 services in case of natural disaster or terrorist attack. These backup centers proved useful during the pandemic, because agencies were able to provide greater social distancing of employees who were “spread out” at multiple facilities.

Telephone and online reporting of relatively low-level types of crime by the public also helps to reduce unnecessary contact between officers and the public, while remaining responsive to their needs. Agencies should ensure they have the technological capability to offer these alternative reporting methods, and should make them available always, not only during a public health crisis, so that community members and police officers will be familiar with how the systems work.

6. Ensure that jail operations are part of the overall planning effort.

Jails and lockups require additional planning, given the potential for outbreaks among individuals held at the facilities, as well as among correctional officers and other personnel. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many sheriffs’ offices and other agencies that operate jails and

4. “COVID Data Tracker; Variant Proportions.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions>

lockups actively reduced jail populations and the number of individuals being booked into jails. This required coordination with courts, judges, and other local police agencies. Jail operations during a pandemic should be an essential element of planning efforts.

7. Plan for adjustments to recruit and in-service training.

At the start of the pandemic, many agencies had to suspend their recruit training, because in-person gatherings were restricted. Some shifted to virtual learning platforms to various degrees. In-service training was also curtailed, because of restrictions on business travel as well as social distancing requirements. Again, some agencies moved training to virtual platforms for in-service training, but some trainings required in-person participation, such as firearms recertifications.

Recruit and in-service training should not stop entirely because of a pandemic. Agencies should develop the infrastructure and capacity to deliver some training virtually, while also creating safe work-arounds for in-person training when possible.

8. Be prepared for impacts on recruiting new officers.

Even as many departments had to cancel recruit classes, they also had to suspend many types of in-person events that police traditionally have used to encourage candidates to seek a career in policing. But many agencies created virtual alternatives to in-person recruiting activities. In some instances, virtual recruitment efforts allowed agencies to expand their applicant pool and make the hiring process quicker and more efficient.

9. Be prepared for how pandemic events may impact police budgets.

The widespread economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic reduced tax revenue as businesses shut down or lost sales. Because police departments often are the largest line item in a municipality's budget, it can be difficult or impossible to shield police agencies from budget cuts during an economic crisis. In 2020, many police chiefs anticipated COVID-related budget

cuts and began taking the initiative to implement cost-saving measures in advance. These leaders found it preferable to maintain some say over spending reductions, as opposed to having cuts imposed on them.

10. Monitor crime trends closely for emerging issues.

In 2020, as states began implementing stay-at-home orders and businesses closed, crime opportunities shifted, which led to changes in criminal behavior. For example, residential burglaries declined, because many people were working from home and fewer homes were unoccupied. Meanwhile, commercial burglaries in some cities increased, because businesses were unoccupied. Some agencies reported increases in domestic violence, which they linked to economic strains that COVID-19 was causing in some households, and increased tensions when abusers were spending more hours per day at home.

By the summer and fall of 2020, homicides, shootings, and aggravated assaults began to surge, and many jurisdictions saw historic increases. Courts were forced to essentially shut down jury trials, because of the risk of COVID spreading among jurors and others in the courtroom. And many criminal offenders saw little reason to plead guilty when the alternative was to demand a jury trial that could not take place right away. At the same time, many jails were actively seeking the early release of inmates, in order to allow for greater social distancing and reduce the spread of COVID.

As conditions change rapidly during a pandemic, police agencies need to closely track changes in crime rates in real time, in order to formulate responses.

11. Identify vulnerable populations, and work with partners to meet their needs.

Vulnerable populations, including elderly persons living alone, persons with disabilities, victims of domestic violence and child abuse, immigrant populations, and individuals experiencing homelessness, face greater isolation and risks during a pandemic.

During the pandemic, many police agencies directly assisted vulnerable persons – for example, by knocking on doors of elderly persons and asking if they needed help getting groceries or prescriptions, or bringing PPE and sanitation equipment to homeless encampments. Police also have worked with other government agencies and nonprofit or private-sector service providers to help individuals find assistance.

12. Clearly communicate to the public how police will manage the enforcement of public health guidelines.

As state and local governments implemented public health restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19, it often fell to police agencies to enforce these guidelines. Recognizing the difficulty of enforcing public health measures in the face of resistance from substantial numbers of people, most agencies sought to take an approach that emphasized “education first,” to explain the changing rules and encourage compliance with guidelines. In some cases, particularly ending large gatherings that violated public health guidelines or closing businesses that were operating illegally, police had enforcement roles.

In all cases, it is important to provide the public with clear explanations of what the rules are, and what people can expect from the police in the face of repeated noncompliance.

13. Continue to find ways to engage with the community.

In some ways, community engagement becomes more difficult in a pandemic, because in-person meetings and events are often cancelled. However, community engagement is especially important during critical incidents. So many agencies developed innovative approaches to reaching the public through virtual meetings, social media messaging, and socially distanced events.

14. Ensure that mutual aid agreements and other partnerships are in place and can be called upon when needed.

As police agencies faced multiple crises in 2020-21, they looked to their mutual aid partnerships with neighboring law enforcement

agencies to ensure they would be able to remain operational if a large percentage of their officers became infected with COVID-19, or if additional resources were needed during demonstrations or surges in violence.

Partnerships with public health agencies also were important, in order to ensure that police remained updated on continuing changes in health guidance. And police in many locations provided assistance as public health agencies began distributing vaccines.

15. Be prepared for the unexpected.

Several months into the COVID-19 pandemic, police agencies faced a new crisis in May 2020 when the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer and uses of force by police in other cities resulted in thousands of demonstrations nationwide, many of which ended with civil disturbances and riots. Some cities experienced nightly demonstrations for months. The year 2020 demonstrated that police agencies need to be prepared to address crises on multiple fronts.

Backup Plans and Changing Plays On the Fly

Police agencies are accustomed to facing new challenges and critical incidents on a daily basis. But the COVID-19 pandemic has been an extreme case, because of how it disrupted nearly everyone’s lives for such a long period of time. Police executives cite a number of general practices for responding to such a crisis:

- **Maximum flexibility:** When the pandemic first hit in February 2020, police chiefs quickly understood the threat it posed to their agencies, and made dozens of major changes overnight that in normal times would have taken weeks or months to implement. Some of these changes, such as significant changes in work schedules, likely would have been challenged by unions, and other changes, such as discontinuing in-person response to calls involving minor crimes, might have generated community opposition.

Fortunately, community members and police officers and their labor representatives understood the need for strong responses to a once-in-a-century crisis, so they generally did not oppose many of these changes.

It was important that police chiefs immediately understood the severity of the COVID threat, and realized that they needed to make unprecedented changes without any delay.

Furthermore, the need for changes was not a one-time phenomenon at the beginning of the pandemic. For many months, as COVID infection rates rose and fell and public health guidance changed, police chiefs and sheriffs had to continue making changes, like a hockey team shifting strategies and plays on the fly.

- **Over-communicating:** When police leaders spoke to PERF about their strategies during the pandemic, many said they “over-communicated” about COVID-19 issues, both with their officers and with the community. That means they intentionally repeated their messages often, to ensure that everyone heard and understood the high priority of these messages.

Police chiefs used different forms of communication – especially social media platforms and the news media – to increase the likelihood that different people would receive their messages through media that resonated personally

with them. In-person public events generally were sharply limited during COVID, so police leaders needed to use other ways of communicating.

- **Greatness is the ability to pull off a Plan B.** During periods of rapid change, when leaders are creating new protocols or systems for managing a crisis, it’s helpful to keep in mind that new plans don’t always work out in the way they were intended, so it’s a good idea to have backup plans whenever possible.

For example, years ago when the Detroit Police Department created a new communications center as part of a new headquarters facility, Chief James Craig recommended having a “fallback” communications center in case a terrorist attack disabled their main center. That helped during COVID, when a dispatcher was the first member of the department to die of COVID. Communications workers moved to the fallback center while the main center was shut down and thoroughly sterilized.⁵

Police in Lincoln, NE and Cayuga County, NY also had backup 9-1-1 centers, where call-takers and dispatchers were split into two teams. Other agencies purchased equipment that allowed some telecommunicators to work remotely, or trained additional employees to handle 9-1-1 calls that weren’t actually emergencies.⁶

5. See PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interviews with Aurora, IL Chief Kristen Ziman and Detroit Chief James Craig.” April 1, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril1>

6. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Managing emergency communications centers.” April 2, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril2>

CHAPTER 1:

How Internal Police Operations Changed During COVID-19

Initial Responses to the Pandemic

As cases of COVID-19 in the United States began to spread via community transmission, many governors started issuing orders designed to reduce exposures. For police and sheriffs' departments, these orders generally required social distancing, having employees work remotely where possible, and establishing quarantine periods for those who became infected with or had experienced a potential exposure to COVID-19.

Police agencies nationwide needed to quickly adjust their operations to ensure public safety during the pandemic, while protecting their own personnel. Initial steps focused on activating emergency operation plans and adjusting operations.

Activating Emergency Operation Centers

Although the COVID-19 pandemic had a magnitude unlike anything the United States had faced since the 1918 flu pandemic, many agencies were able to get a good start in responding by implementing their emergency operations centers (EOC). An EOC is a central facility where officials from a number of different agencies can meet to coordinate their response to a disaster or declared emergency.

Many agencies activated their EOCs early in the pandemic. For example, the **San Francisco Police Department** activated its EOC in the second week of February.⁷ Even departments not yet impacted by COVID-19 activated their EOCs at lower levels

early in the pandemic. The **Anchorage, AK Police Department** did so in order to have a unified command response for early preparations, and to ensure a smooth transition into higher emergency levels as the pandemic progressed.

In addition to providing a framework to respond to any crisis, EOCs enable agencies to request needed supplies and focus resources. The **Kirkland, WA Police Department**, located at the early epicenter of COVID-19 in the United States, activated its EOC to coordinate the acquisition of needed supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE). In neighboring **Redmond, WA**, the police department reported that the local EOC community had been beneficial in helping agencies obtain supplies when they were having difficulty finding things like masks and eye protection.

The inter-disciplinary membership of many EOCs was particularly beneficial during the pandemic, especially in the early days when there were many unknowns about the scientific and medical aspects of how the virus was being transmitted, and which measures might slow its spread. Public health agencies participated in many of the EOCs, providing timely information about those key issues of virus transmission. The **Wheat Ridge, CO Police Department** received daily updates from the Public Health Department through its Emergency Manager. Similarly, the **Winston-Salem, NC Police Department** communicated with the County Emergency Management and Public Health Departments to

7. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interviews with police executives." March 19, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch19>

remain updated on the latest information and infection trends within the community to better coordinate their response.

Ensuring Continuity of Operations

During emergency events, police agencies can also rely upon established Continuity of Operations Plans (COOPs). COOPs provide guidance to ensure that mission-critical functions remain operable during an emergency event. Many COOPs addressed the key issue of strategies for minimizing the loss of personnel during an influenza event. COVID-19's high level of contagion made this particularly important.

From the very first days and weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, police agencies across the United States focused on preventing the virus from sweeping through their entire staff or through particular squads or units. Most departments immediately understood the potential for disaster if most or all of their officers became infected or had to be quarantined because they were exposed to an infected person. Entire police agencies, or critically important units, might need to be closed.

To prevent that from happening, departments quickly changed work schedules to reduce the probabilities that officers would come into contact with other officers. Some agencies changed from 8-hour to 12-hour shifts, and many created separate cohorts of officers, with the goal of ensuring that all officers in Cohort A, for example, would never have occasion to come into contact with officers in Cohort B. The **Duluth, MN Police Department** shifted all but a few of its 158 sworn officers to uniformed patrol, working 12-hour shifts for 5 consecutive days, followed by 15 days off, when they were expected to follow stay-at-home orders and other protective measures.⁸ The 15 days off functioned as a type of quarantine to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

As the threat of COVID-19 increased, an initial step taken by many agencies was to create a COOP specific to COVID-19, or to review and update their existing COOPs. The **Topeka, KS Police Department (TPD)** created a tiered COOP. Under this system, if COVID-19 infections or quarantining

of officers due to COVID resulted in high levels of absenteeism, resources would increasingly be shifted to the Field Operations Bureau (patrol). Each level of TPD's three-tiered COOP was based on sustained levels of absenteeism rate across all three patrol shifts for 48-72 hours. The tiers of response were:

1. Warning – At this initial phase, all training of officers and special duty assignments across all bureaus would be cancelled, in order to support essential functions.
2. Daily Reassignments – The second phase required bureau commanders to be prepared to reassign personnel to the Field Operations Bureau.
3. Temporary Assignments – At this phase, personnel from throughout the department could be placed on temporary assignment to support the Field Operations Bureau for 14 days or more.

When absenteeism rates returned to manageable levels, normal operations would be resumed.

Agencies with existing COOP plans updated the plans to address the specifics of COVID-19. The **Milton, GA Police Department** created a tiered approach. At the lowest stage, initial precautions were taken. The next step included limiting non-critical meetings and utilizing technology to meet remotely. At the top tier of the updated COOP, the department would focus only on providing critical services, such as responding to 911 calls.

Another consideration for COOPs was the ability of some personnel to telecommute. When drafting its COOP, the **San Diego, CA Sheriff's Department** created a list of employees who could effectively work remotely, such as the IT Division and payroll, budgeting and finance, and contracting staff. Some detectives were also able to work remotely; however, the majority of sworn personnel were unable to do so.

8. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Staffing and scheduling," April 13, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril13>

Continuity of 911 Centers

As noted in an early PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, 911 Centers were especially vulnerable in the COVID-19 crisis:

“If too many patrol officers become symptomatic or infected with the virus and must self-quarantine, agencies can assign detectives and other former patrol officers to patrol duties. But 911 operators have many complex, specialized skills that cannot be quickly taught to other employees.... In smaller 911 Centers, the loss of even a handful of telecommunicators can severely impact operations.”⁹

911 center contingency plans focused on determining whether call-taker services could be conducted remotely, and if not, how to staff 911 centers in a way that provided adequate staffing levels but also allowed for social distancing and other protective measures to prevent infections of call-takers.

The **Alexandria, VA Department of Emergency and Customer Communications** found ways for some of its 911 communications personnel to work remotely, using VESTA CommandPost kits connected through FirstNet hotspots. With some employees working remotely, the remaining staff members at the 911 center were able to maintain social distancing. The remote work capability also allowed personnel who had been exposed to someone with COVID-19 to quarantine, but still work.¹⁰

Other jurisdictions quickly prepared to shift to remote working if needed. **Arlington, VA** recognized that they might need to move some of their personnel to work remotely if they had a confirmed case of COVID-19 with exposure to other personnel. The city prepared 20 consoles that could be activated

if the need arose.¹¹ The **Hamilton County, OH** 911 Center also began planning to purchase new equipment if operators needed to work remotely.¹²

The **Dane County, WI Department of Public Safety Communications** set up three remote call-taking stations for employees who were at risk for COVID-19 and would not have been able to remain working if they were required to be in the 911 center. The remote workstations included two laptops and two monitors, with one laptop connected via VPN to the county’s network infrastructure, which enabled the call-takers to access a Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) workstation. Each remote workstation was connected using FirstNet.

The remote call-takers worked regular hours with their in-person counterparts and could also act as back-up if a shift needed additional capacity. The department also strategized about how to ensure that remote workers could set up the remote workstations without requiring an IT technician to be on-site, and developed a simplified installation guide. Given the success of the remote workstations, the department is planning to add another four remote workstations and to explore the possibility of remote dispatching in addition to remote call-taking.

The **Northeast Emergency Communications Center**, which provides 911 services to three counties in Northeast Missouri, also set up remote workstations that could be used remotely. These kits included three laptops. Each laptop was designated to handle one of three functions: 911 call handling, CAD access, or radio access. When needed, the kits would simply be delivered to an employee’s home and could be online relatively quickly.¹³

9. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Managing emergency communications centers.” April 2, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril2>

10. Urgent Communications. “Virginia 911 center leverages remote capabilities, FirstNet to help address COVID-19 challenges.” May 15, 2020. <https://urgentcomm.com/2020/05/15/virginia-911-center-leverages-remote-capabilities-firstnet-to-help-address-covid-19-challenges/>

11. Rapid SOS. “9-1-1, Where is the Location of your Dispatchers?” <https://rapidsos.com/our-latest/9-1-1-where-is-the-location-of-your-dispatchers/>

12. WCPO.com. “First responders, 911 centers in Hamilton County adapting to combat COVID-19.” March 30, 2020. <https://www.wcpo.com/news/coronavirus/first-responders-911-centers-in-hamilton-county-adapting-to-combat-covid-19>

13. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. “Responding to a Pandemic: Technology Considerations for Public Safety Answering Points.” October 23, 2020. <https://www.cisa.gov/blog/2020/10/23/responding-pandemic-technology-considerations-public-safety-answering-points>

Working remotely was not an option for every 911 center, so agencies also considered other ways to protect their telecommunications personnel¹⁴:

- In **San Francisco**, the Emergency Operations Center was moved into the local convention center to allow for more space for 911 personnel.
- **Lincoln, NE** divided its staff between its primary and backup communications centers.
- The **Collier County, FL Sheriff's Office** isolated 20% of their Emergency Communications Center (ECC) staff to their backup center, so not everyone was concentrated in a single location.
- In the event of a staffing shortage, the **Cincinnati ECC** trained all support and administrative staff on how to answer non-emergency calls and to do CAD entry. This would allow a diminished number of call-takers to focus solely on emergency calls.

Adjusting Staffing to Reduce COVID-19 Transmission and Ensure Staff Availability

While Continuity of Operations Plans addressed staffing problems if large numbers of police personnel were to become ill, police agencies also implemented numerous strategies for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission among officers. These included adjustments to work schedules, expanding days off, and using technology to monitor infection rates.

Work Schedules

Many jurisdictions switched to a 12-hour shift schedule as the threat of COVID-19 increased within their communities. For the **Santa Cruz, CA Police Department**, this switch occurred when the department moved to phase two of its emergency response

plan.¹⁵ The 12-hour shifts reduced the opportunities for officers to come into contact with other officers during shift changes. As agencies moved to 12-hour shifts, adjustments were also made to days off, further reducing COVID risks:

- The **Appleton, WI Police Department** built a type of “quarantine period” into their schedules. The department created four work teams, and each team worked for 7 days on 12-hour shifts, and then were off for 14 days.¹⁶
- The **Washington County, MN Sheriff's Office** had shifts work 5 days on, 10 days off, and 3 days “on call,” for a total of as many as 13 days off patrol.¹⁷

Other agencies also took the approach of having officers on-call, but not physically working a shift. The **Park Ridge, IL Police Department** created a Paid On Call program. Shifts were split into two platoons. While one shift worked, the other platoon maintained a “Paid On Call” status. While on call, personnel were expected to remain in a state of readiness to work immediately if necessary. During this time, personnel were also expected to be sheltering in place at home.¹⁸

The **Hayward, CA Police Department** created three teams, with each team working 7 days on and 14 days off. The department had one of the three teams on standby, ready to be dispatched in the event that the on-duty team staffing dropped below minimum levels.¹⁹

Personnel Assigned to Specialized Units

To ensure adequate patrol staffing, many agencies reassigned personnel from specialized units to patrol and other areas of need within the agency. In many agencies, school resource officers (SROs) were reassigned to other assignments as schools closed and transitioned to remote learning.

14. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Managing emergency communications centers.” April 2, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril2>

15. City of Santa Cruz, Memorandum, Police Department. “Standard Operating Procedure regarding COVID-19.” March 23, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/Santa%20Cruz%20Covid19%20SOP.pdf>

16. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Wisconsin chiefs discuss their increase in cases.” October 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidoct7>

17. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Staffing and scheduling.” April 13, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril13>

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

- The **Naperville, IL Police Department** and the **Charleston County, SC Sheriff’s Office** both reassigned their SROs to assist with telephone and online crime reporting services.²⁰ As the pandemic worsened, many departments closed precinct stations to the public and encouraged or required community members to report low-level crimes, traffic accidents, and other information via telephone or online, rather than in person.
- As courts closed, the Charleston County, SC Sheriff’s Office also reassigned courthouse officers to assist with phone reporting, as did the **Volusia County, FL Sheriff’s Office**.²¹

For specialized units that needed to remain staffed, agencies took steps to help personnel assigned to the units to remain healthy. The **Tempe, AZ Police Department** instituted a new work plan for some of its specialized units, including the Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Threat Mitigation units. Personnel in these units were split 50/50, so that only half of the team worked together at any given time, in order to prevent exposure to the virus and preserve critical staffing within these units.²²

Monitoring of Staffing Levels

Despite the precautions taken by agencies to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, the infectiousness of COVID-19 made it almost inevitable that some personnel would be impacted. Knowing this, many agencies closely tracked their staffing levels, monitoring the number of officers who had symptoms, had tested positive, and/or were unable to work.

Many agencies tracked the impact of COVID-19 on staff through data dashboards.

- The **Chicago Police Department (CPD)** used a dashboard that tracked whether the number of officers off duty went over a certain percentage. The dashboard allowed CPD to track the information for individual districts, shifts, or the entire department.²³
- The **Seattle Police Department (SPD)** also created an internal data dashboard to trace personnel exposure to COVID-19. By keeping track of this data, SPD would be alerted if there was a possibility that a whole watch, squad, or precinct might be impacted by COVID-19.²⁴

In addition to staffing, agencies collected data to monitor availability of equipment and crime levels.

- The **Fairfax County, VA Police Department** created a **COVID-19 Emergency Bureau**. As part of its function, the bureau produced CompStat reports on staffing, including the number of personnel teleworking, quarantined, or on administrative, injury, or sick leave. The bureau also tracked calls for service and crime on a daily basis and produced a weekly analysis of trends. Doing so allowed the bureau to identify any issues of concern, such as an increase in commercial burglaries.²⁵
- The **Wilmington, DE Police Department** also tracked the availability and usage of PPE supplies, in addition to staffing levels. This helped the department ensure it maintained adequate supplies for officers.²⁶

20. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Adjusting work schedules and suspending roll calls.” March 18, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch18>

21. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Patrol officers share their experiences.” May 20, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay20>

22. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Adjusting work schedules and suspending roll calls.” March 18, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch18>

23. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Supporting and managing officers out sick.” April 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril7>

24. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “The pandemic’s impact on data collection, analysis, and metrics.” June 3, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune3>

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

Adjusting the Police Response To Requests for Services

In an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, many agencies adjusted their response protocols for both essential and non-essential services. The goal of these changes was to reduce in-person contacts between first responders and the public, thereby helping to ensure that officers would remain healthy and available for critical functions, while still serving the needs of the community.

Changes in Essential Services

COVID-19 forced many agencies to evaluate the priority level of calls for service. When residents call 911, they typically expect a police officer or sheriff's deputy to respond in person. However, during COVID-19, in-person contacts could put both first responders and the public in jeopardy. Therefore, many agencies adjusted their response policy to stipulate that officers and deputies only responded in person to high-priority calls.

- The **Wauconda, IL Police Department** defined high-priority calls to include the following: calls involving forcible felonies, batteries or domestic disputes, burglaries where evidence needs to be collected, motor vehicle crashes, violent crimes, crime against persons, or as otherwise directed by shift supervisors.²⁷

For calls that did not warrant an in-person response, agencies utilized telephone and online reporting to ensure that the public would receive a response.

For example, the **Metropolitan Nashville, TN Police Department** issued guidance for officers on what calls could be addressed via a telephone report. The list included²⁸:

- Non-injury minor vehicle crashes that are not blocking a roadway and where there are no disturbances between drivers, no driver impairment, and no vehicles that have to be towed;
- Lost property (wallet, purse, phone, etc.), excluding firearms or narcotics;
- Identity theft with no physical evidence to collect;
- Thefts from a publicly accessible space, including shoplifting and thefts from yards, construction sites, public storage facilities and detached garages where the perpetrator is not present, the loss is less than \$5,000, and there is no recoverable evidence at the scene;
- Thefts from vehicles, excluding firearms, where there is no recoverable evidence at the scene;
- Vandalism or damage to property where the perpetrator is not present and the loss is less than \$5,000.

The **Norfolk, VA Police Department** took an innovative approach to reducing in-person contacts between officers and the public for non-emergency calls. The department launched an app, called NPD Live, through which residents could video chat with an officer about the reason for their call. Before the call is routed to this option, dispatchers take the initial call and verify that it is a non-emergency call and ask whether the citizen would like to continue the process via video through the app. It is also intended as a way to reduce response times.²⁹

Police departments also took steps to alert the public to these service adjustments, using social media and press releases to explain how best to contact the police during COVID-19. The **Fairfax County, VA Police Department** promoted its online and telephone reporting systems for non-emergency calls through Facebook and Twitter.³⁰

27. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Limiting in-person police responses." June 3, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune3>

28. WMOT.org. "Reacting to coronavirus, MNPD limits officer in-person calls." March 19, 2020. <https://www.wmot.org/post/reacting-coronavirus-mnnpd-limits-officer-person-calls#stream/0>

29. WAVY.com. "Norfolk PD starts video chat option for non-emergency crime calls." Oct. 16, 2020. <https://www.wavy.com/news/local-news/norfolk/norfolk-pd-starts-video-chat-option-for-non-emergency-crime-calls/>

30. Fairfax County Police Department. Reporting Eligible Calls for Service. *Facebook*, March 28, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/103085949733551/posts/3691879027520874/?d=n>



Fairfax County, VA Police Department Facebook Message About Online Reporting

Other agencies used technology platforms to keep citizens updated when they call 911. A platform called SPIDR³¹ enabled the **Allen, TX Police Department** to inform 911 callers about changes in service. Individuals who called 911 would receive a text message informing them that an officer would call them to take minor reports over the phone instead of in person. The department could also send a hyperlink to a video message that further explained how the department had adjusted operations as a result of COVID-19.³²

Changes in Non-Essential Services

Members of the public come into contact with police for many reasons beyond public safety issues. To keep communities and police personnel safe during the COVID pandemic, agencies had to look at all of the services they offer and make changes to non-essential services.

For example, many agencies closed the public areas of their buildings to the general public and halted other public services, including fingerprinting of community members for background checks, clearances, etc.; document requests; and ride-alongs. Agencies also suspended their in-person

participation in community meetings, volunteer programs, and cadet and reserve officer programs. Other services, such as registering sex offenders, were moved to an online or telephone service.

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 In Jails

For police and sheriffs' departments that manage jails or lockups, the threat of COVID-19 was particularly acute. Jail settings are especially vulnerable to the rapid transmission of illnesses due to the close quarters in which individuals are held. To reduce the spread of COVID-19, jail managers looked to reduce the inmate population and strengthen health and cleaning procedures within the jails.

Reducing the Inmate Population

The goal of reducing the inmate population was to limit crowding and increase social distancing practices within the jail setting. This was accomplished by limiting the number of people coming into the jail and by granting release to some individuals already in the jail. Between March and May 2020, jail populations reportedly decreased by approximately 30%.³³

31. City of Allen, TX. "Allen Police Department gives first-year review of SPIDRTech software." February 25, 2021.

<https://www.cityofallen.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=3995&ARC=8268>

32. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Engaging the community while social distancing." April 24, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril24>

33. Washington Post. "Prisons and jails have become a 'public health threat' during the pandemic, advocates say." November 11, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/coronavirus-outbreaks-prisons/2020/11/11/b8c3a90c-d8d6-11ea-930e-d88518c57dcc_story.html

Reducing the number of jail bookings required coordination between police departments and sheriffs' offices. The **Pinellas County, FL Sheriff's Office (PCSO)** encouraged the use of pre-arrest diversion programs and Notices to Appear, as opposed to arrests by police departments. With this and other changes, PCSO reduced its jail population by 1,000 inmates in three weeks.³⁴

Many jurisdictions also discouraged arrests for misdemeanor crimes.

- With the exception of domestic violence, the **Multnomah County, OR Sheriff's Office** used citations in lieu of arrest for all misdemeanors.³⁵
- The **South Burlington, VT Police Department** also allowed citations to be issued instead of arrest, with exceptions for domestic violence-related incidents, including violations of conditions related to intimate partner violence and abuse prevention orders, and any hate-motivated crimes.
- In Dakota County, MN, the Chief Judge of the First Judicial Court released an order allowing the **Dakota County, MN Sheriff's Office** to quash misdemeanor warrants issued by the District Court. Exceptions to this order included warrants for domestic related assaults and violations related to orders for protection, domestic abuse no-contact orders, or harassment restraining orders. When a warrant was quashed, the Sheriff's Office was to set a hearing date and time and provide notice to the person.

Releasing Hundreds of Inmates Early

Another method to reduce jail populations was the early release of inmates. This required collaboration between local police departments, sheriffs' offices, prosecutors, and judges. Because social distancing

was one of the few known ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19, reducing jail populations was considered a necessity. However, the release of inmates needed to be carefully balanced with public safety.

While police executives generally recognized the need to hold down jail populations, in hindsight a number of them said that too many jail inmates were released in 2020. And too often, inmates were released without controls such as meaningful probation oversight, and without services that otherwise would be given to released inmates, such as drug treatment and assistance finding employment. Some police chiefs expressed concern that releasing jail inmates may have contributed to increases in some crime types.

Many jurisdictions used risk assessments to determine who would be released from jail.³⁶

- **New York City:** The Manhattan District Attorney's Office conducted a review of the 2,000 individuals held in the Rikers Island jail whose cases were tried by their office. Instead of using categories of crime to determine release, individual determinations were made as to whether someone would be released, based on factors such as the threat individuals pose to public safety (including their criminal history and history of warrants), whether they were incarcerated for parole violations, whether they were serving short sentences, and their risk of contracting COVID-19. Using this risk assessment approach, the DA's office reduced the number of individuals held in Rikers Island for a case from the Manhattan DA's office by 45%.³⁷
- **Chicago:** The Cook County, IL State's Attorney Office considered release of inmates who were in jail in lieu of posting bail under \$1,000, who were elderly, who had preexisting medical conditions, or who were pregnant. Following these efforts, the jail population dropped from 5,600 to 4,020.

34. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Police and sheriffs are working together to level out COVID response." May 18, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay18>

35. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interviews with Kirkland, WA Chief Cherie Harris." March 17, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch17>

36. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "District attorneys hope some COVID changes will stick." May 28, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay28>

37. Manhattan DA. "D.A. Vance's Written Testimony for City Council Committees on Criminal Justice and Justice System Oversight Hearing on "COVID-19 in City Jails and Juvenile Detention Centers." <https://www.manhattanda.org/written-testimony-on-covid-19-in-city-jails-and-juvenile-detention-centers/>

- **Los Angeles:** The Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office focused its screening efforts on whether an inmate posed a danger to others, by looking at the crime committed and their history. Additionally, the sheriff already had a policy to release individuals with a bail of less than \$25,000. That limit was increased to \$50,000. The jail population dropped from 17,000 to 11,800.

Ensuring that Released Inmates Would Have Support Outside of Jail

In addition to public safety concerns, there were concerns about whether individuals released would have the necessary support once out of jail.

- Some inmates in the jail managed by the **Hennepin County, MN Sheriff’s Office** expressed concern about leaving the jail during the pandemic, because they did not know where they would find safe housing. In response, the Sheriff’s Office allowed some of these individuals to remain in the jail, and worked with the county’s housing services to identify safe housing options for other inmates.³⁸
- The **King County, WA Prosecuting Attorney’s Office** worked with a program called Co-LEAD to assist individuals leaving the jail system with the goal of preventing recidivism. Under this program, 16 caseworkers helped individuals find housing and address their basic needs.³⁹

Health Procedures Within the Jails

While efforts were taken to reduce the overall jail population, more stringent health procedures were needed to protect those who could not be released – as well as the correctional officers and staff working in the jails.

Jails quickly restricted access to their facilities. For example:

- The **Essex County, MA Sheriff’s Office** suspended visitations with the exception of attorney visits from March through July 2020. In October 2020, visitation was again suspended due to a COVID-19 outbreak, before reopening in November.⁴⁰
- After a period of suspension, the **Cook County, IL Sheriff’s Office** resumed visitations, but only outside in tents.⁴¹

With jail visitations curtailed, some agencies waived fees for phone calls. For example, the **Charleston County, SC Sheriff’s Office** waived phone call fees in its juvenile detention center. Additionally, the Sheriff’s Office continued video visitation in the detention center, albeit on a more limited basis. All of the stations for video visitation were cleaned each hour.

For new inmates entering jails, many agencies added COVID-19 screening procedures to the intake process.

- The **Pinellas County, FL Sheriff’s Office** screened everyone coming into the jail, and conducted temperature checks. Once admitted to the jail, individuals were not placed into the general population area until they had quarantined for 14 days in a separate unit. The Sheriff’s Office also screened all employees.⁴²
- The **Hernando County, FL Sheriff’s Office** also utilized screening. Individuals entering the jail were asked a series of questions about their travel history and contact history with individuals who had traveled outside of Florida and/or had been exposed to COVID-19. Depending on how they answered, inmates might be escorted to isolation in the medical unit.

38. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interviews with sheriffs about jails and officer wellness.” March 31, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch31>

39. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “How the pandemic has changed prosecutors work.” May 28, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay28>

40. Danvers, MA Patch. “Visitation To Resume At Middleton Prison On Monday.” Nov. 5, 2020. <https://patch.com/massachusetts/danvers/visitation-resume-middleton-prison-monday>

41. WTTW.com. “Containing COVID-19: Jails, Prisons Ripe for Spread.” Nov 12, 2020. <https://news.wttw.com/2020/11/12/containing-covid-19-jails-prisons-ripe-spread>

42. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Collaboration between police departments and sheriffs’ offices.” May 18, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay18>

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning procedures also were deployed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the jail system. (In the early months of the pandemic, it was considered important to wipe down surfaces with anti-viral cleaning supplies. It was only later that public health experts found that using PPE such as masks was far more important in preventing the spread of COVID-19 than disinfecting desktops, door handles, etc.⁴³)

- The **Milwaukee County, WI Sheriff's Office** ensured that all correctional staff had appropriate PPE when escorting symptomatic/exposed inmates or new arrivals to the jail.
- The **Palm Beach County, FL Sheriff's Office** provided deputies with biological suits that could be used in the field or in the jail.⁴⁴
- The **Dane County, WI Sheriff's Office** used robots that emit high-intensity UV to disinfect the jails. This same technology is used in hospitals and surgical suites and targets MERS, SARS, and other respiratory illnesses.⁴⁵

Social distancing capabilities inside jails were also needed to fight the spread of COVID-19. With reduced populations, jails were able to make adjustments that facilitated social distancing. For example, the **Milwaukee County, WI Sheriff's Office** reduced its jail population by more than 200 inmates, which allowed the jail to house inmates in single-person cells. By reducing its jail population, the **Jefferson County, CO Sheriff's Office** was able to devote an entire floor to quarantining inmates who may have had a COVID-19 exposure.⁴⁶

The Police Role in Ensuring Compliance With Public Health Orders: Educators versus Enforcers

As state and local governments implemented stay-at-home orders, social distancing guidelines, mask requirements, business capacity restrictions, and other public health orders, enforcement of these orders almost always fell to police agencies. Many agencies took a measured approach to enforcing the guidelines by focusing on education, rather than strict enforcement policies.

The goal was to encourage voluntary compliance before taking punitive measures. Police chiefs expressed concern that heavy-handed enforcement actions could backfire, causing even greater resistance. And police had nowhere near the resources to implement strict enforcement. Court operations were severely compromised by COVID, and jails were trying to *release* inmates, not increase admissions. So any warnings of strict or widespread enforcement actions would have been a hollow threat.

When Massachusetts implemented a statewide order requiring face coverings in public, the **Cambridge, MA Police Department** distributed masks and educational materials to individuals not wearing masks, instead of issuing fines.⁴⁷

The **Tucson, AZ Police Department** also emphasized education over enforcement. In an email to all members of the department, Chief Chris Magnus wrote, "Specific questions about the enforcement of [the Governor's order restricting people from leaving their homes except for essential activities] should be directed to your chain of command or department legal advisor, but as with previously issued executive orders and the mayor's proclamations, our primary role is to educate and provide the opportunity for compliance."

43. Nature. "COVID-19 rarely spreads through surfaces. So why are we still deep cleaning?" Jan. 29, 2021. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00251-4>

44. Palm Beach Post. "Coronavirus in Florida: PBSO buys 4,000 biological suits." March 10, 2020. <https://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/20200310/coronavirus-in-florida-pbso-buys-4000-biological-suits>

45. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interviews with sheriffs about jails and officer wellness." March 31, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch31>

46. Ibid.

47. The Boston Globe. "Many police departments are giving out masks instead of fines for scofflaws amid coronavirus." May 14, 2020. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/05/14/metro/many-police-departments-passing-fines-mask-scofflaws-amid-coronavirus/>



ABOVE: Demonstrators protest COVID-19 restrictions in California.

RIGHT: Flyer Distributed by NYPD Personnel.

Police agencies also proactively worked to educate the public about restrictions and safety measures in place. When beaches in San Diego reopened in late April 2020, but only for jogging, walking, or surfing, the **San Diego Police Department** saturated the area with signage letting visitors know what activities were allowed. As Chief Dave Nisleit explained:


“We’ve put out an enormous amount of signage. Our boardwalks are closed, our parking lots are closed, and our piers are closed. You can’t go more than 20 yards without running into a sign saying the area is closed. On the sand, there are signs everywhere saying you can’t stop, you can’t sit, and you can’t have chairs or beach towels.”⁴⁸

In May 2020, the **Los Angeles Police Department** reported having multiple protests a week about COVID issues. Deputy Police Chief Robert Arcos said that “we also have more people coming from outside the city to agitate for reopening the state... The real work at hand is maintaining constant communications with different groups.”⁴⁹

The **New York City Police Department** also used signs to educate the public and businesses about restrictions. When additional restrictions were put into effect in November 2020, the department

NOTICE

Effective Friday
11/13/20 at
10:00pm



- **All bars, restaurants, gyms, or fitness centers, as well as any State Liquor Authority-licensed establishment** will be required to close from 10 PM up to 5 AM daily statewide.
- **Curbside food-only pick-up or delivery may continue after 10:00 p.m.** so long as otherwise permitted (alcohol to go is prohibited after 10:00 p.m.).
- **Nonessential indoor and outdoor gatherings at private residences are limited to no more than 10 people**, provided that social distancing, face covering, and cleaning and disinfecting protocols are adhered to.

For more details, visit:
coronavirus.health.ny.gov

202.74 Effective through December 12th, 2020

NYC

instructed officers to disseminate a flyer to all bars, gyms, restaurants, fitness centers, and establishments registered by the state liquor authority. The flyer clearly explained the new restrictions, when they would become active, and how long they would remain in effect.

Like other agencies, the **Metropolitan Police Service of London** aimed to educate people as much as possible, as opposed to taking enforcement actions against persons who violate public health orders. Deputy Commissioner Sir Steven House said that the Met’s process was “to engage, explain, educate, and, if necessary, to enforce.”

However, in a January 2021 Daily COVID-19 Report, Sir Steven told PERF that the arrival of a new, more dangerous variant in the UK had changed things, because it was sharply increasing COVID transmission rates in London and in the Police Service.

As a result, he said, “We have seen an increase in our enforcement. We are issuing far more tickets to people, particularly tickets to organizers of events.

48. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Challenges in California, Florida, and Texas beach towns.” May 6, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay6>

49. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Preparing for demonstrations and protests in big cities.” May 14, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay14>

The government has authorized us to hand out tickets... So if you organize a birthday party [at a restaurant], invite 20 people, and they turn up, we'll issue a 10,000-pound ticket to the licensee of the restaurant, and everybody who's there will get a ticket for up to 100 pounds."⁵⁰

Police departments have worked with the news media and social media to raise awareness of public health regulations. In addition to communicating his expectations about COVID enforcement to his officers, Chief Magnus of the **Tucson Police Department** wrote an op-ed to the Tucson community about how the department was responding to the pandemic.⁵¹

Social media afforded many departments a direct channel to the community in a time of limited in-person interaction.

- The **Tempe, AZ Police Department** participated in public service announcements produced by the city to explain guidelines, such as restrictions on the use of public parks.⁵²
- **LAPD** Chief Michel Moore answered questions about his department's COVID-19 response through a Facebook livestream.⁵³

Police also recognized the importance of ensuring that their messages about COVID guidelines were accessible to all members of the community.

- The **Ennis, TX Police Department** posted public service announcements on social distancing in both English and Spanish. The city also created

a dedicated Facebook page for Spanish-speaking residents.⁵⁴

- When the **Bellevue, WA Police Department** held a Town Hall to address bigotry against Asian-Americans, they arranged to have the meeting translated into Mandarin.⁵⁵
- The **Houston Police Department** conducted outreach to undocumented immigrants to provide masks and other information, in response to fears from this population about seeking assistance, given their immigration status.⁵⁶

Police departments also sought to be a visible presence in the community to work as a deterrent to violation of COVID orders, without resorting to enforcement. The **Camden County, NJ Police Department**, the **Riverside, CA Police Department**, and the **Myrtle Beach, SC Police Department** were among the agencies that increased patrols during the pandemic, particularly in areas where people congregate, such as parks and shopping centers.⁵⁷

Although education was the preferred approach, agencies sometimes needed to take enforcement action when education efforts did not succeed.⁵⁸

- The **Honolulu Police Department** found that warnings became less effective as the quarantine period stretched on. The department began tracking individuals who received multiple warnings and enforcing guidelines more strictly for those individuals.

50. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interview with London Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Sir Steven House." January 8, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid8jan21>

51. The Arizona Daily Star. "Tucson Police Chief Magnus: We are here 24/7 and we need your help protecting all from COVID-19." March 29, 2020. https://tucson.com/opinion/local/tucson-police-chief-magnus-we-are-here-and-we-need/article_ad257ed2-95ea-56ba-8342-44cf6d2bd796.html

52. YouTube. City of Tempe. "Playing the Parks Safe." April 10, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfevgRuk_Ok

53. LAPD Headquarters. "Coronavirus AMA with LAPD Chief Moore." March 18, 2020. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/lapdhq/videos/coronavirus-ama-with-lapd-chief-moore/204153880923211/>

54. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Communicating with immigrant communities." May 1, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay1>

55. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Hate crimes against Asian-Americans." May 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay7>

56. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Communicating with immigrant communities." May 1, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay1>

57. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "The role of sergeants." April 15, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid-19-response>.

See also PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Reopening businesses in Georgia and South Carolina." May 5, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay5>

58. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Honolulu Chief Susan Ballard, Kauai Chief Todd Raybuck, and Miami-Dade Police Director Freddy Ramirez discuss enforcement of COVID regulations." Sept. 24, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidsep24>

Spring Break Enforcement

In Spring 2021, municipal police agencies in popular Spring Break destinations faced large crowds of students and other partygoers. Some jurisdictions implemented curfews in an effort to curb crowds, which then had to be enforced. Agencies generally continued the practice of working to gain voluntary compliance through education, rather than enforcement.⁵⁹

- The **Clearwater, FL Police Department** conducted outreach to bars and restaurants to obtain their help enforcing compliance. Officers asked these businesses to ensure their staff wore masks and limited capacity to allow for greater social distancing.
- The **Daytona Beach, FL Police Department** used a drone to monitor the Main Street area to identify large crowds gathering, which was usually an indication of an altercation. Police officers could then work

to de-escalate and separate individuals as needed.

- The **Miami Beach, FL Police Department** utilized civilian goodwill ambassadors to help defuse situations before police intervention became necessary. Although compliance through education was preferred, police agencies did at times have to take action.

“We want people to understand our role, which is maintaining peace and order,” said Miami Beach Police Chief Rick Clements. “At the same time, we have a humanitarian responsibility to try to keep what we think could be a super-spreader event in check. We’ve handed out thousands of masks over the last two weeks in an effort to try to curb the potential for a super-spreader event, as people go back to wherever they’re from.”⁶⁰

- The **Miami-Dade, FL Police Department** focused more on enforcement when COVID-19 cases spiked in July 2020. At first, the only enforcement option available was a misdemeanor arrest. The department worked through the county commission to update the civil citation process, so that civil citations could be issued for any infractions. This allowed officers to take enforcement action without having to resort to arrests.

Community Engagement

The pandemic severely limited the ability of police departments and sheriffs’ offices to engage in person with their communities. Many community relationship-building activities had to be halted. At the same time, agencies were being asked to enforce social distancing guidelines, which had the potential to increase tensions with the public.

To stay connected with the community despite these challenges, police adapted their engagement strategies to the pandemic.

59. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Spring break in Florida beach cities.” March 9, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid9mar21>

60. PERF Critical Issues Report, “Agencies that have vaccinated a high percentage of their employees and spring break in Miami Beach.” March 25, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues25mar21>

Connecting with Vulnerable Communities

Despite restrictions on in-person gatherings, agencies sought to create positive connections with the communities they serve, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations.

Because of their vulnerability, elderly populations were a large focus of engagement efforts.⁶¹

- In collaboration with the local fire department, the **West Palm Beach, FL Police Department** conducted welfare checks at local assisted living facilities.
- Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Chicago Police Department** had created a list of vulnerable seniors, which they used to conduct welfare checks during extreme hot or cold weather conditions. During the pandemic, the department used this list to check on vulnerable individuals, remind them of public health recommendations, and offer support. By April 2020, the department had made 23,000 phone calls and 3,400 in-person visits to seniors.
- The **Chatham, MA Police Department** coordinated with local agencies to conduct grocery and pharmacy runs for elderly residents, to help them avoid potential exposure to COVID-19.

Agencies also helped address food insecurity during the pandemic.⁶²

- The **Mesa, AZ Police Department** partnered with local ministries and the United Food Bank to help deliver food to those in need.
- The **San Mateo, CA Police Department** also helped facilitate food deliveries by working with local partners.

Some agencies adjusted their usual community outreach efforts to accommodate COVID-19 restrictions.

- The **Martinsville, VA Police Department** conducted “wellness walks” in neighborhoods throughout the city to engage in person with the

community, but in a socially distant manner to ensure safety. These walks allowed the department to remain visible in the community, and also sought to improve the community’s morale by encouraging people to get out of their homes for a change of scenery.

To maintain connections with the community, agencies relied heavily on technology to connect via virtual platforms. In many instances, the use of technology allowed residents who might not be able to attend an in-person meeting to participate in an online session.⁶³

- The **Richmond, CA Police Department** and the **Fairfax County, VA Police Department** continued community meetings through online platforms to answer questions and keep the community informed.
- With schools closed, school resource officers (SROs) lost a vital connection with their student community. In response to this, the SROs in the **Saco, ME Police Department** participated in virtual meetings where they read books to students. SROs also helped deliver lunches to children in the free lunch program, and they assisted with outreach to elderly persons by making phone calls and conducting in-person welfare checks when needed. Saco police also created a Community Resource Hotline number to direct people to resources.



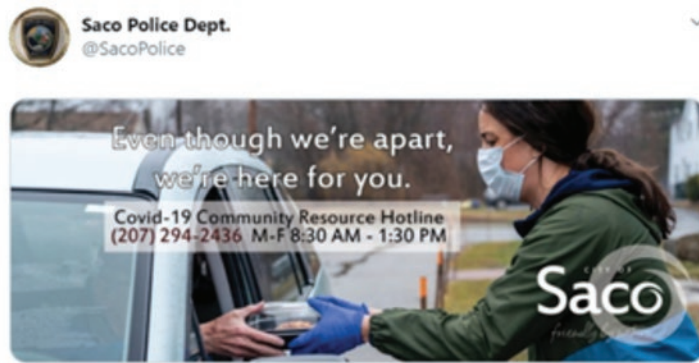
Clearwater, FL Lt. Natalia Illich-Hailey reading to preschoolers as part of the Officer Friendly Book Club

61. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Engaging the community while social distancing.” April 24, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril24>.

See also PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Protecting elderly persons and Miami PD heat maps.” April 9, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril9>

62. Ibid.

63. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Engaging the community while social distancing.” April 24, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril24>



Saco, ME Police Department

Salisbury, MD Police Reached Out to Vulnerable Poultry Plant Workers

In the early months of the pandemic, some parts of the United States had not yet been impacted, while others had emerged as COVID “hot spots.” And some of the worst hot spots were in meatpacking and poultry production facilities.

Salisbury, MD was one of those locations, with a COVID growth rate that was the 9th fastest in the nation in late April 2020, due largely to the spread of COVID in chicken processing facilities.⁶⁴ Salisbury Police Chief Barbara Duncan knew that many poultry workers were Haitian and Hispanic immigrants, and many were not fluent in English, and as a result might not be receiving information about COVID risks and protective measures.

“Fear of the government is tangible in these two communities,” Chief Duncan told PERF.⁶⁵ So the Salisbury Police Department took on that challenge, working with public health agencies and others to



communicate with those vulnerable populations and give them guidance.

“For police to be seen as a resource, instead as just another part of the government to be feared, is going to be a huge win for us,” Chief Duncan said. “COVID has forced us to adopt different ways of thinking about how we provide our services. It has underscored the need for us to be out there connecting with and guiding our community members, in the face of, in some cases, overwhelming fear. This will change the way we view who we are.”

64. Delmarva.now. “Salisbury metro area among the nation’s fastest-growing hotspots for COVID-19.” April 29, 2020.

<https://www.delmarvanow.com/story/news/2020/04/29/salisbury-metro-area-among-nations-top-hotspots-covid-19/3039284001/>

65. “PERF Trending: The ‘Social Distancing Police’ vs. Community Policing.” May 9, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/trendingmay9>

The Impact of COVID-19 in College Towns, And the Police Role

At the start of the pandemic, most colleges and universities suspended in-person learning. However, as the 2020-2021 school year began, some colleges and universities started welcoming students back to campus for in-person classes in the fall of 2020.

As a result, campus police and municipal police departments in cities and towns with colleges and universities had to do their best to protect the health and safety of their own officers, students, faculty and staff members, as well as the wider community, with the threat of COVID-19 still very present.

As noted in a recent PERF report about relationships between campus police and municipal police agencies in college towns, the COVID-19 pandemic was an example of the tensions that can develop between students and the more permanent residents of a city or town.⁶⁶

Because many students come from other places, they may not be familiar with the history and traditions of the city or town they have relocated to. And because most students typically move away after graduation, they may have little or no interest or commitment to the long-term well-being of the city or town.

COVID cases on campuses have been a major concern.... Compared to the general populations of the cities and towns where their campuses are located, students tend to be young and at relatively low risk for life-threatening illness if they contract the coronavirus. That can lead to resentment among residents when students hold large parties or otherwise fail to adhere to public health regulations or guidelines.

[Furthermore,] it appears that the presence of a college or university can result in higher rates of

COVID infections and deaths in the surrounding community. A New York Times study of 203 counties where students make up at least 10% of the population found that COVID-related deaths increased faster in those college-rich counties than in the rest of the nation during the fall semester months of September-December 2020.

“Few of the victims were college students, but rather older people and others living and working in the community,” the Times article stated.⁶⁷

Colleges and universities implemented health guidelines to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the campus community. At some universities, enforcement of these orders was largely left to the school administration, not campus police, because students were more concerned about sanctions affecting their status as students than about any citations they might receive from police.

- The **University of Notre Dame Police Department** said that “we are not the social distancing and mask police.” Instead, the university relied upon student and staff ambassadors to encourage compliance. The campus police provided security for quarantine locations.⁶⁸
- The **Boston College Police Department** had an officer stationed at each quarantine and isolation location 24/7. The department’s community service officers also drove vans to transport sick students as needed.⁶⁹

Classes were not the only in-person events that started with the Fall 2020 semester. Sports events with limited attendance were also held. Campus and surrounding municipal police departments were involved in security for these events, just as they were under normal operations. In some instances, however, campus police would have to enforce

66. Police Executive Research Forum. *Municipal and Campus Police: Strategies for Working Together During Turbulent Times*. Pp. 3, 20. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/MunicipalCampusPolice.pdf>

67. The New York Times. “Young People Have Less Covid-19 Risk, but in College Towns, Deaths Rose Fast.” December 12, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/12/us/covid-colleges-nursing-homes.html>

68. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “University police chiefs discuss school reopening plans.” July 30, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjuly30>

See also PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Midwest university police chiefs discuss local COVID increases and students return to campus.” October 19, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidoct19>.

69. PERF Daily COVID-10 Report, “University police prepare for the spring semester.” January 6, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjan621>

public health guidelines. The **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Police Department** had to eject some patrons at football games who were not following guidelines after they had received multiple warnings.⁷⁰

Campus and local police departments also faced challenges from students' behavior off-campus. In particular, agencies had to contend with student parties that exceeded limits set by local and state governments. In March 2021, the **Boulder, CO Police Department** responded to a crowd of about 800 students who had gathered off campus. After initial attempts to disperse the crowd were unsuccessful and the crowd started turning violent and turning over cars, the department's SWAT team responded and was able to disperse the crowd with minimal force.⁷¹



Off-campus disturbance in Boulder, CO in March 2021.
SOURCE: @K1DDN TWITTER

Utilizing Technology

Like most workplaces across the country, police agencies quickly moved to adopt a range of technologies to ensure that work could continue during the pandemic. Unlike some professions, policing often requires direct in-person interactions with the public. But technology did enable some police personnel to work from home, and also provided a viable alternative to in-person meetings.

Enabling Work-from-Home Capabilities

As a way to reduce contact within police facilities, many agencies quickly began to identify which employees could potentially telework. Selected administrative and investigative staff members were able to perform their duties remotely.

For those employees able to work remotely, there was a need to ensure that remote work could occur smoothly and securely. Many types of police records and communications are highly confidential, so police technology providers had to ensure that employees working remotely would have the same

high level of security as those using computers and databases located in police facilities.

The **Bellevue, WA Police Department's** detective unit worked remotely. The unit had a skeleton crew in the office, while the rest worked from home. Remote work was not mandated, but was encouraged as a way to reduce unnecessary exposure to COVID-19.

In an April 2021 survey of PERF members, 88% of respondents reported that they had staff working remotely at some point during the pandemic.⁷² Of the agencies reporting that they had employees working remotely,

- 96% said the remote workers included professional staff members;
- 46% said that some command staff members worked remotely;
- 46% said that some detectives worked remotely; and
- 3% said that some emergency communications center personnel worked remotely.

70. Ibid.

71. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Managing large parties and violence in college towns." March 15, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid15mar21>

72. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "Survey on Pandemic-Related Staffing and Technology Changes." April 13, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues13apr21>

At the time of the survey (March-April 2021), 56% of the respondents had brought all of their staff back into the office.

Approximately 14% of responding agencies expected to permanently have some employees working a hybrid schedule after the pandemic was over, and 20% were considering it; 66% said they did not expect to have hybrid schedules after the pandemic.

Remote Conferencing

Even police personnel who did not shift to remote work utilized video and telephone conferencing as a means to continue vital meetings while maximizing social distancing practices. The **Calgary, AB Police Service** began using video conferencing during the pandemic to generally communicate with officers. The agency held weekly live streams that featured various agency leaders and allowed officers to send in questions and comments. For example, in one live stream, the chief spoke with the agency's nurse and psychologist about the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷³

Other agencies also used remote conferencing capabilities to hold CompStat meetings, including the **New York City Police Department (NYPD)**, which invented CompStat. The **Fayetteville, NC Police Department** also held CompStat virtually on Zoom, and focused on issues such as tracking COVID-19-related calls for service. That allowed the department to identify which crime trends were related to COVID-19 and which shifts experienced a higher volume of these calls.⁷⁴

Remote conferencing platforms also helped advance investigations. To continue investigations during the pandemic, agencies utilized video conferencing to conduct interviews. For example, the **Hampton, VA Police Department's** homicide investigators used Zoom to obtain witness statements. Detectives said that conducting these interviews virtually made it easier to connect with witnesses.⁷⁵

Police Use of Drones For COVID-Related Purposes

In Chula Vista, CA, police were concerned that persons experiencing homelessness were especially susceptible to COVID. Police partnered with public health and other service agencies to offer a range of assistance, but many homeless persons were camping in hard-to-reach urban canyons, rather than shelters that were seen as possible hot spots for COVID.

Police used drones to find the locations of camps and homeless persons, and used speakers on the drones to tell individuals about the assistance that was available, and where and when help could be received.

In Daytona Beach, FL and Elizabeth, NJ, police used drones to fly over parks and other areas and announce messages about the parks being closed due to COVID. "You can hear the loudspeaker drones clearly from about 200 feet," said Daytona Beach Sgt. Tim Ehrenkauf. "Most people comply; I'd say we have a 95% success rate," said Elizabeth Deputy Police Chief Giacomo Sacca.⁷⁶

Impacts of COVID-19 on Training

Both recruit and in-service training were sharply curtailed by COVID-19 in many locations. Restrictions on travel and on large in-person gatherings forced agencies to cancel or reduce the size of training sessions. But because training is a vital part of policing, many agencies worked hard to find ways of continuing training or restoring it as soon as possible during the pandemic.

Recruit Training

Every year, a certain number of police officers retire or resign, and in 2020, retirement and resignation rates in police agencies increased sharply compared to 2019, according to a PERF survey (see page 32).

73. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "Interviews with Canadian officials." April 8, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril8>

74. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "The pandemic's impact on data collection, analysis, and metrics." June 3, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune3>

75. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "How COVID-19 has impacted homicide investigations." May 21, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay21>

76. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Using drones for COVID-related purposes." June 5, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune5>

Because police agencies must recruit, train, and hire officers every year just to keep up with retirements and resignations, any delays in recruit training can have a significant impact on police operations.

The COVID-19 pandemic created significant challenges for police recruiting.

- For example, the **Washington State Police Training Commission**, which trains all recruits in the state, closed its campus for a 30-day period in March 2020, before gradually bringing back some recruits and adopting virtual learning platforms.⁷⁷
- During the beginning of the pandemic, the **NYPD** graduated a recruit class early and suspended the next recruit class. New classes were not held until November 2020.⁷⁸
- The **Metropolitan Washington, DC Police Department** was able to continue its training by separating its eight recruit classes into small groups at different locations, to keep them isolated from each other.⁷⁹

Other agencies moved to online training. The **Camden County, NJ Police Department** switched to a virtual format with assistance from the local community college. Aspects of the training that had to be held in person, such as defensive tactics and other physical training, were put on hold.⁸⁰

“We felt that we could accomplish [the transition to virtual learning] without any loss in the quality of the training, and we were very successful,” said Capt. Kevin Lutz of the Camden County Police. “Our local community college helped us utilize the platform they use for their online learning. It’s not the same as in-person training, but we delivered everything

we usually teach in the classroom to the best of our ability.”⁸¹

The **Macon County, IL Law Enforcement Training Center (MCLETC)** also switched to online training, a process that took approximately a week. MCLETC also developed protocols that allowed them to bring some recruits back to campus to complete in-person training. For example, recruits needed to complete 10 hours of firearms training in person. Recruits received COVID tests and were housed in individual rooms. Classroom sizes were limited to 10 people. For hands-on training, such as defensive tactics, they were paired with the same person for the duration of their stay at the academy.⁸²

In-Service Training

In-service training was also impacted by COVID-19.

- At the start of the pandemic, the **Minneapolis Police Department** suspended most in-service training for two months, and deadlines for state minimum training requirements were delayed to January 2021. Mandatory training on electronic control weapons (ECWs) and qualifying courses for rifles continued, with a limited number of officers in each class. All nonmandatory training was canceled until July 2020, and training-related travel was prohibited unless it involved mandatory certification training.⁸³
- The **Chicago Police Department** promoted its class of sergeants and lieutenants early when the academy closed only a week into their six-week training. The department, however, continued to provide training virtually to the newly promoted sergeants and lieutenants. For example, the newly

77. The Seattle Times. “Police academy’s closure because of coronavirus outbreak delays efforts to train new officers.” March 17, 2020. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/crime/police-academy-closure-because-of-coronavirus-outbreak-delays-efforts-to-train-new-officers/>

78. Fox 5 New York. “NYPD to welcome 900 new recruits in first class since pandemic.” October 23, 2020. <https://www.fox5ny.com/news/nypd-to-welcome-900-new-recruits-in-first-class-since-pandemic>

79. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, “Interviews with police executives.” March 19, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch19>

80. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Changes to training programs.” May 27, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay27>

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Minneapolis Star Tribune. “With human contact a no-no, Minneapolis police are getting creative with officer training.”

May 25, 2020. <https://www.startribune.com/with-human-contact-a-no-no-mpls-police-are-getting-creative-with-officer-training/570752172/?refresh=true>

promoted sergeants and lieutenants received Blue Courage training via Zoom.⁸⁴

- The **Burlington, NC Police Department** was able to complete its state-mandated trainings through an online training portal run by the state. However, the agency’s supplemental training on active shooters, driving, ICAT de-escalation, reality-based training, and range practice all had to be suspended because they required close contact with others. Remedial training continued in small groups of no more than three individuals.⁸⁵

“We try to do training outside at an offsite facility, with instructors using masks and officers using PPE for any type of reality-based scenario where they have to go hands-on to show proficiency,” said Burlington Lieutenant Shelly Katkowski. “There are some things that can’t be taught online and have to be done physically, and it’s important to teach these skills, because not having them would create greater risks for the officers and the public.”⁸⁶

Impact on Recruiting and Hiring

Even before the onset of COVID-19, many police agencies were struggling to recruit enough qualified candidates to keep pace with resignations and retirements of officers. This situation was made even more challenging by the pandemic and other challenges faced by police agencies in 2020, including the hundreds of demonstrations and protests following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and other controversial uses of force by police.

In a June 2021 survey, PERF assessed the impact of these factors on police hiring, resignations, and retirements.⁸⁷ Specifically, the PERF survey asked member agencies to provide the number of officers they hired, and the numbers of officers who resigned or retired from their agencies, between April 1, 2019

Average Hiring, Resignation, and Retirement Rate per 100 Officers, April 2019-March 2020 and April 2020-March 2021



PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, “Survey on police workforce trends.”

and March 31, 2020, and during the same 12-month period from 2020 to 2021.

Overall, respondents reported that hiring rates decreased by 5%, resignation rates increased by 18%, and retirement rates increased by 45%. PERF asked survey respondents to comment on their staffing issues, and many said they were struggling to attract applicants.

All of these factors highlight the importance of recruiting.

In response to a different PERF questionnaire conducted in May 2020, in the early months of the pandemic, 75% of respondents reported that they had been forced to make changes to their recruiting and hiring practices at the onset of the pandemic.⁸⁸

84. WBEZ.org. “Could Self-Care And Breathing Techniques Help Veteran Chicago Police Officers Reform The Department?” May 13, 2020. <https://www.wbez.org/stories/could-self-care-and-breathing-techniques-help-veteran-chicago-police-officers-reform-the-department/6a85b55f-9778-4930-86a9-9aa9b9d9f02f>

85. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Changes to training programs.” May 27, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay27>

86. Ibid.

87. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, “Survey on police workforce trends.” June 11, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/workforcesurveyjune2021>

88. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “The impact of COVID-19 on police recruitment and hiring practices.” June 12, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune12>

Due to state and local guidelines, some agencies had to cancel or postpone recruiting events – particularly those that required traveling to colleges, job fairs, and other events. Any recruiting events that police agencies could continue hosting had to allow for social distancing, resulting in much smaller, scaled-down events. Budget cuts and the closures of police academies also led many agencies to completely halt their recruiting efforts, because there was little reason to recruit candidates if they could not start training to become new officers.

Despite the challenges, many agencies adapted to the pandemic by utilizing technology and implementing safety precautions. Candidate interviews were held virtually, and recruiting was conducted online through social media and virtual recruiting events. Aspects of the process that had to be held in person, such as the physical fitness exam, were adjusted to protect the health of all involved. Written exams were held in larger spaces or moved online.

Polygraph examinations conducted as part of recruiting programs were especially challenging. Many agencies contract with outside organizations to conduct polygraph exams, many of which suspended their operations during COVID-19. Some police agencies moved the polygraph exam to the end of the process or worked to establish a procedure that was compliant with COVID-19 guidelines.

The **Metropolitan Washington, DC Police Department** completely transitioned its in-person screening process to a virtual format. One of the challenges was how to maintain a streamlined process, because their in-person process typically involved multiple steps, including background screening, a written exam, and a physical fitness test, that could be completed in one session. Despite having to reorganize the process, the department still saw a large number of applicants.⁸⁹

Effective Internal Communication

In the spring of 2020, as COVID-19 cases rapidly spread across the United States, there was a great deal of information being shared about how to reduce the risks of being exposed to the virus. Some of the information was contradictory, and information changed over time.

For example, in the first months of the pandemic, it was believed that the coronavirus could survive on surfaces, such as desks, door handles, telephones, automobiles, etc., and could easily be spread by people touching these surfaces. So a great deal of effort was expended on disinfecting these surfaces. Later, it became clear that COVID-19 was not easily spread in this way. Other information, such as the importance of wearing masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, proved to be correct over the long term.

Because police officers and sheriffs' deputies are frontline responders who had to continue being out among the public throughout the pandemic, it was critically important for police chiefs and other department leaders to be able to provide accurate and timely data to officers and deputies, especially during the early months when much was unknown.

Regular communications between agency leaders and officers were essential to keep the entire agency informed, to ensure that officers understood how department leaders expected them to perform their work, and to address the concerns of officers and deputies.

Agency leaders used a variety of methods to communicate with their members:

- **Miami Police Department:** Chief Jorge Colina used video messages to communicate. In one update, Chief Colina reassured his department that “it is completely normal to be a little stressed out” and that “we’re going to do like we always do, which is take care of each other and get through this. It is all going to be okay.”⁹⁰

89. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, “Recruiting in an era of COVID and police reforms.” September 2, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissuessep2>

90. YouTube: “Message from Chief Jorge Colina.” March 17, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeCiuB0kx5E&feature=youtu.be>

- **Tucson, AZ Police Department:** Chief Chris Magnus sent almost daily emails to every member of the department. These emails covered a range of issues related to COVID-19, including PPE availability, potential budget impacts, leave options, and how to engage with the community.
- **Middletown Township, PA Police Department:** Chief Joe Bartorilla personally contacted each of his officers who were out sick with COVID-19 on a daily basis.

First-line supervisors always play an important role in the chain of communication in police agencies, and that has been especially true throughout the pandemic. Sergeants and other first-line supervisors ensured that messages from agency leaders were disseminated to everyone in the field, and they played a large role in reinforcing those messages. For example, sergeants helped ensure that officers and deputies followed agency guidance in the field, such as maintaining social distance while on duty, and the difficult, sensitive task of encouraging community members to comply with public health mandates.

“The chief sends the department updates several times a week,” said Tucson Police Sergeant Alon Hackett. “It’s the job of the first-line supervisors to be on top of it, understand it, and explain it to the officers. The supervisor’s job is to make sure officers understand the chief’s message, and that they remain safe.”⁹¹

Police also used their intranet sites, accessible only to members of the agency, to consolidate COVID-19 information in a single place.

- The **Vancouver, BC Police Department** used its intranet to post videos from the chief and deputy chief on a variety of topics. The site is accessible to officers when they are on- and off-duty.⁹²
- The **NYPD** uses its intranet to consolidate information on the latest COVID-19 public health and medical guidelines, the number of personnel on

sick leave, COVID-19 positive rates within the department, and operational plans.

- The **Metropolitan Police Service of London** uses an intranet site to provide updates as new scientific information is released, as well as any changes in practice and procedures.⁹³

Impact of COVID-19 on Police Budgets

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a worldwide economic recession in the spring and summer of 2020, as businesses closed or struggled to stay afloat in the face of slower economic activity.

The COVID-19 recession immediately raised concerns about municipal budgets, especially in cities where a high percentage of tax revenue comes from sales taxes, rather than property taxes or other revenue sources.

Because police agencies are typically the largest single item in a jurisdiction’s budget, it is difficult for municipal leaders to entirely protect police agencies when tax revenues decline. And the budgetary situation for police agencies grew even worse in May 2020, when the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer prompted widespread calls for police reforms, including demands that police agencies be “defunded.”

In April 2020, the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) released findings from a survey of 2,400 cities. Of those surveyed, 88% of cities expected a revenue shortfall due to COVID-19, with 52% predicting that needed budget cuts would impact police and public safety.⁹⁴

A PERF questionnaire in July 2020 had similar findings, with 48% of respondents saying that their agency’s budget has already been decreased or they expected it to be decreased in the current and upcoming fiscal years. More than half of those agencies seeing or anticipating a decrease in their budget expected that reduction to be between 5% and 10%.

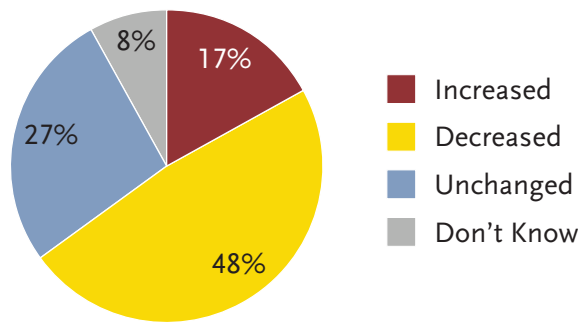
91. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “The role of sergeants.” April 15, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril15>

92. Ibid.

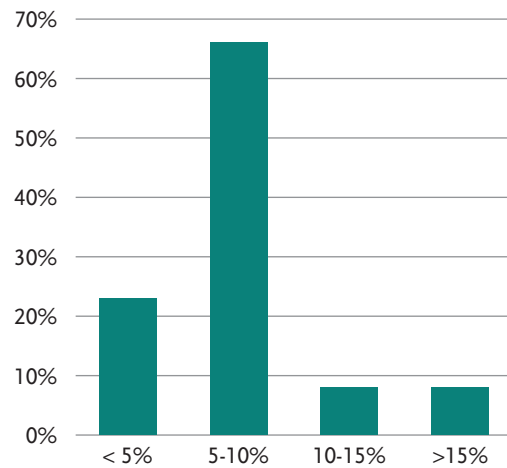
93. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interviews with London Met Deputy Commissioner Stephen House and PSNI Chief Constable Simon Byrne.” April 6, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril6>

94. U.S. Conference of Mayors. “Cities Report Pandemic Creating Painful Budget Shortfalls, May Force Furloughs and Layoffs.” April 14, 2020. <https://www.usmayors.org/2020/04/14/cities-report-pandemic-creating-painful-budget-shortfalls-may-force-furloughs-and-layoffs/>

For the current/upcoming fiscal year, has your agency's budget been, or do you anticipate it will be, increased or decreased?



How large do you anticipate the budget reduction to be?



PERF Survey, "How COVID-19 and Defunding are Impacting Police Budgets"⁹⁵

Police agencies began preparing for budget cuts early in the pandemic.⁹⁶

- The **Dakota County, MN Sheriff's Office** considered video conferencing for court hearings as a more efficient alternative to in-person hearings. This saves money and time, as staff do not have to transport individuals to court for a short hearing.
- The **Marathon County, WI Sheriff's Office** studied electronic monitoring as a way to reduce the population in the jail and save costs.

For most agencies, 2020 was not the first time they had to implement significant budget cuts. Following the 2008 economic crisis, the **Stockton, CA Police Department** had to cut a quarter of its officers after the city filed for bankruptcy. One lesson

the police learned from the experience was not to cut community engagement activities, because the trust between an agency and the public is especially vital during difficult times.⁹⁷

"One mistake we made back then was to quit doing community engagements when we were hit really hard with staffing and budget shortfalls," said Stockton Police Chief Eric Jones. "We said we just didn't have the time or resources to go to community meetings or engage in community projects. But the community members responded, 'We want to help. Let us help.' We realized that tough times are when we need them the most. We made a mistake in pulling up the drawbridge to the community, and it took us a while to gain their trust again."⁹⁸

95. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "How COVID-19 and defunding are impacting police budgets." August 3, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidaugust3>

See also PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Budget challenges in police departments and sheriffs' offices." April 27, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril27>

96. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Budget challenges in police departments and sheriffs' offices." April 27, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril27>

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

CHAPTER 2:

Officer Safety and Wellness During COVID-19

IN NORMAL TIMES, THE SAFETY AND WELLNESS of police officers and sheriffs' deputies are a paramount concern for any agency. During the pandemic, this concern became even more important, but also more difficult to manage.

As COVID-19 continued to spread throughout communities nationwide, the severity of the illness and the level of contagiousness highlighted the importance of protecting all personnel. As mentioned previously, a first step many agencies took was to restructure their patrol schedules, with a focus on creating separation in the ranks to isolate any potential outbreaks and to build in quarantine periods with off days. There were many other steps that agencies took to help protect their personnel.

Social Distancing On-Duty

Police agencies worked to ensure that personnel could maintain social distance while on patrol. Many agencies moved their roll calls outside or held them online. The **Green Bay, WI Police Department** suspended roll calls and had officers report directly to their squad calls.⁹⁹

In addition to closing police buildings to the public, some agencies restricted the movement of their own personnel in certain areas of the building.

- For the **Long Beach, CA Police Department**, this involved staggering the start time of squads on the three patrol shifts by 30 minutes, to help ensure that everyone could properly distance in locker rooms and the rest of the facility.¹⁰⁰
- The **San Jose, CA Police Department** staggered entry into police facilities for its Bureau of Investigations. Half of the units came in at one time, with the other half coming in later in the day.¹⁰¹
- In the **Green Bay, WI Police Department**, personnel were assigned to work on one of three floors, and were not allowed to go to a different floor except for emergencies.¹⁰²
- The **Janesville, WI Police Department** also separated personnel by floors, and created substations and work groups, some of which met outside of the department. For example, initially some substations were created at middle schools, which were vacant after schools closed, and some groups worked from home.¹⁰³

99. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Wisconsin chiefs discuss their increase in cases." October 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidoct7>

100. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Staffing and scheduling." April 13, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril13>

101. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interviews with police executives." March 19, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch19>

102. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Wisconsin chiefs discuss their increase in cases." October 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidoct7>

103. Ibid.

Shifting to 1-Person Squad Cars to Prevent Spread of COVID

Agencies with 2-person squad cars considered whether to shift to 1-person cars to minimize the potential for spreading the virus.

This change was not necessarily made lightly, because 2-person cars help to ensure that officers always have back-up when they respond to violent crime calls. However, with the risk of COVID-19, some agencies, including the Yonkers, NY Police Department and the Philadelphia Police Department, did shift to 1-person cars.

“Both of our unions – the supervisory officers’ union and the Police Benevolent Association – were very helpful in making this change,” said Yonkers Police Commissioner

John Mueller. “We brought them to the table and worked through it together. They like two-officer cars for safety reasons, especially in areas with more violent crime. So we told them that we would continue to sending two officers, but in two different cars. If they need backup, we use four one-officer cars. They were given very strict instructions not to leave each other. After we talked about it, the unions thought it made sense.”¹⁰⁴

In the **Baltimore Police Department**, 2-person cars were used when absolutely needed. When there were two people in the car, both officers were required to wear masks and PPE.¹⁰⁵

Implementing Safety Protocols

Beyond staffing changes and social distancing, agencies took additional steps to ensure a safe working environment.

Health Screenings

To detect symptomatic COVID-19 cases as early as possible, many agencies implemented temperature checks. Before reporting to work, officers and deputies were required to have their temperature taken to ensure they were not sick. While this measure was ineffective in identifying asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19, it was still an important component of many agencies’ safety plans. The **San Jose, CA**

Police Department checked temperatures as individuals went into briefings, all of which took place outside. Officers were also required to check in with their supervisors twice a day to report if they were experiencing any signs or symptoms of illness.¹⁰⁶ The **San Diego Police Department** also implemented department-wide temperature checks.¹⁰⁷

At the **Miami Police Department**, officers were required to be screened as they came into work. If they were deemed healthy, they were given a wristband indicating they had been screened. The color of the bands being distributed changed each day, so that fellow officers and members of the public would be reassured they were interacting with an officer who had been screened that day.¹⁰⁸

104. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Updates from Yonkers, NY; Los Angeles; and Northern Italy.” May 15, 2020.

<https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay15>

105. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Supporting and managing officers out sick.” April 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril7>

106. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interviews with police executives.” March 19, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch19>

107. The San Diego Union Tribune. “Policing during COVID-19: Officers face new threat in the line of duty.” May 26, 2020. <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/public-safety/story/2020-05-26/policing-during-covid-19-officers-new-threat-in-the-line-of-duty>

108. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interviews with police executives and officer wellness resources.” March 23, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch23>

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The scarcity of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was a major focus early in the pandemic, and guidance regarding PPE changed frequently. The situation varied from state to state, and from city to city, depending in part on whether agencies had adequate stockpiles of N95 face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and other supplies.

As COVID began to spread across the United States, an early report by PERF revealed how police officers and the public were gradually becoming aware of the importance of PPE:

- There was some variation in whether agencies at that time required officers to wear masks whenever they were out in public. But many chiefs said

that the public expected officers to wear masks. Officers in some cities also were becoming aware of how many of their colleagues tested positive for the coronavirus, which resulted in greater willingness to use masks.

- Some departments were getting help from local businesses, local police foundations, and their unions in acquiring supplies of PPE. And police departments with plenty of PPE were sharing it with other agencies. For example, after the **Boston Police Department** received a large shipment of surgical masks to supplement its supply of N95 masks, the department donated some of the surgical masks to smaller, neighboring agencies.¹⁰⁹

Safety Protocols Were Similar Around the World

Police agencies around the world had remarkably similar COVID protocols. For example, Italy's Carabinieri Colonel Pietro Carrozza, who commands the Verona region, the part of Italy that was hardest hit by COVID, told PERF that his agency kept infections down with very strict rules about sanitation procedures.

"I gave the orders, then I was out checking that the orders were applied night and day," Colonel Carrozza said.

- I checked that every single station had glass panels to protect the carabinieri from infection by citizens coming into the station to report a crime.
- I closed our waiting rooms, because it's a place where the virus can spread. Now people wait two meters apart outside and come inside one at a time.
- I shut down the elevator, because it's a place where people can easily spread the virus.

- I decreased the number of seats in the mess by 50%, and people are now eating two meters apart. When they finish eating, they have to wipe down the tables.
- I separated shifts, so the morning shift was not meeting with the afternoon shift, and the afternoon shift was not meeting with the evening shift.
- We patrol in couples, so there are two patrolmen or patrolwomen per car. I made those couples fixed, so they are not rotating.
- I stopped every kind of training.
- I have the entire barracks sanitized every two weeks.

Even though Italy experienced an early, severe outbreak of COVID, Colonel Carrozza said that as of April 30, 2020, only 15 of his 1,000 officers had tested positive, and he had no fatalities in his department.

109. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Police use of masks." April 14, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril14>

Cleaning Protocols

Enhanced cleaning protocols were another key factor in many agencies' early plans for keeping their employees safe. This element of COVID-19 public health guidance became less important over time, as evidence mounted that few cases of COVID-19 transmission were the result of touching surfaces that a COVID-infected person had touched. But in the early days of the pandemic, regular cleaning of police buildings, vehicles, uniforms, and equipment provided reassurance to officers and deputies.

For example, in March 2020 the **Santa Cruz, CA Police Department** disseminated detailed steps for employees on decontamination procedures at the beginning and end of each shift:

- All employees must wash their hands or use hand sanitizer upon entering the building.
- Thermometers are stationed near the back door and Investigations. Employees are asked to voluntarily take their temperature to determine if they have a fever.
- At the end of their shift, officers shall wipe down their duty gear and boots with a sanitizing product.
- Consider the shift you just worked and assess whether you need to send your uniform to the cleaners. The department will increase the laundry cycle if uniforms need more frequent cleaning. Do not wash uniforms at home.
- If an officer is going to take their firearm or radio home, they shall wipe it down with disinfectant before taking it home.¹¹⁰

Screening Calls for Service To Collect Health Information

In the early weeks and months of the pandemic, when COVID-19 infection rates were still relatively low in most cities, some police agencies sought information about the location of active COVID-19 cases within their jurisdiction. Doing so allowed officers and deputies to take greater precautions when responding to a location or address with known COVID-19 cases. To obtain this information, agencies added screening questions to their call-taker procedures, asking whether anyone at the caller's address was known or believed to be COVID-positive.

By adding screening questions to call-taker protocols, first responders were given advance warning if they were about to come in contact with someone who had been exposed to COVID-19, so the officers could be especially careful about using PPE. Agencies also could look back at dispatch records to see whether officers had recently responded to locations with COVID-positive persons, so they could consider quarantining the officers.

To screen callers for this information, communications personnel from the **Tampa, FL Police Department** asked callers three questions:

1. Have you or anyone in your household come in contact with someone who tested positive for the Coronavirus in the last 30 days?
2. Have you had a fever or cough in the last 3 days?
3. Have you traveled out of the country within the last 30 days?

If a caller answered yes to any of the questions, that information would be flagged in the call notes.¹¹¹

The **Arkansas Division of Emergency Management** launched a campaign titled "Take Control, Let Us Know," encouraging people statewide to sign up for Smart 911. Smart 911 is a service that allows people to provide their medical information to

110. City of Santa Cruz, Memorandum, Police Department. "Standard Operating Procedure regarding COVID-19." March 23, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/Santa%20Cruz%20Covid19%20SOP.pdf>

111. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interview with Kirkland, WA Chief Cherie Harris." March 17, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch17>

first responder agencies, in order to help first responders to provide better service to them.¹¹²

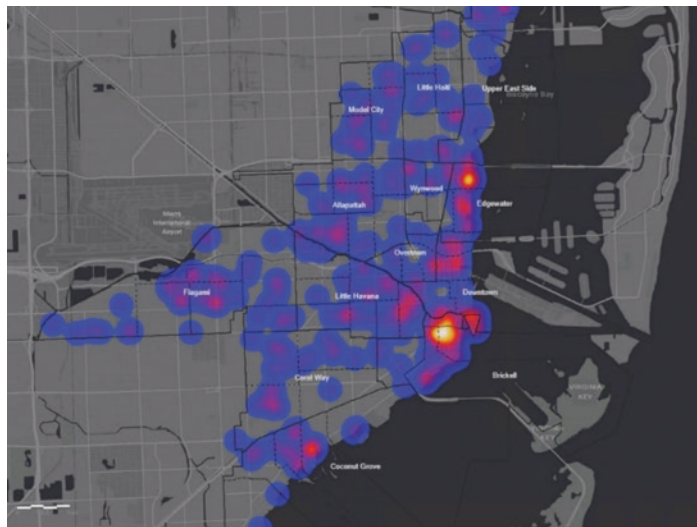
In addition to screening calls as they came in, some agencies obtained data about the location of persons with COVID-19 from their local public health departments. Access to this information was blocked in some jurisdictions, however, because of privacy concerns.

The **Fairfax County, VA Police Department** had access to a heat map of addresses that showed COVID-19 cases. The data included location, but not the name or personal information of individuals involved. This information allowed the department to see whether there was a confirmed COVID-19 case at a call location officers responded to.¹¹³

The **Miami Police Department** also used heat maps to track COVID-19 cases in the city.¹¹⁴ The public health department provided updates on a daily basis on locations in the city where someone had tested positive. This data also did not include personal information.

Some agencies faced HIPAA concerns¹¹⁵ when trying to obtain data about COVID-19 in their jurisdiction. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released guidance about disclosing COVID-19 to law enforcement agencies. Under this guidance, protected health information (PHI) of an individual with COVID-19 or exposed to COVID-19 can be shared with law enforcement under the following circumstances:

- When the disclosure is needed to provide treatment;



Miami, FL COVID-19 Heat Map¹¹⁶

- When such notification is required by law;
- To notify a public health authority in order to prevent or control spread of disease;
- When first responders may be at risk of infection;
- When the disclosure of PHI to first responders is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the health and safety of a person or the public;
- When responding to a request for PHI by a correctional institution or law enforcement official having lawful custody of an inmate or other individual.¹¹⁷

>> continued on page 42

112. 5Newsonline.com. Arkansas Division of Emergency Management urging families to sign up for Smart911 during coronavirus pandemic. March 20, 2020. <https://www.5newsonline.com/article/news/arkansas-division-of-emergency-management-urging-families-to-sign-up-for-smart911/527-e7a58f60-c2c6-43cc-b4d0-8473af7defda>

113. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “The pandemic’s impact on data collection, analysis, and metrics.” June 3, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune3>

114. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Miami Police Chief Jorge Colina explains how his department uses daily ‘heat maps.’” April 9, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril9>

115. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) is a federal law that required the creation of national standards to protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patient’s consent or knowledge. <https://www.cdc.gov/phlp/publications/topic/hipaa.html>

116. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Miami Police Chief Jorge Colina explains how his department uses daily ‘heat maps.’” April 9, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril9>

117. U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights. “COVID-19 and HIPAA: Disclosures to law enforcement, paramedics, other first responders and public health authorities.” <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/covid-19-hipaa-and-first-responders-508.pdf>

In Israel, Police Enforced Very Tight Restrictions on the Public's Travel and Activities

In April 2020, PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler interviewed Superintendent Micky Rosenfeld, National Spokesman to Foreign Media, Israel Police. Superintendent Rosenfeld outlined the role of Israel Police in enforcing restrictions on public activities that were far stricter than in other countries. Following are excerpts from that interview:

Israel has one national police force with 30,000 officers. As of now, the whole of the national police force is involved in one major issue: preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

By law, anyone who has come back to Israel from abroad has to go through 14 days of isolation. Over the past three weeks, the Israel Police have visited 76,000 people in homes, knocked on their doors, and made contact with them in order to confirm that they are in isolation.

We are also using operational intelligence in the same way we use it for terrorism, to track people and make sure they are where they should be at any given time. For example, this week our special patrol units were tracking telephones of people we have confirmed are COVID-19 positive.

Because of the Jewish Passover festival, which is beginning this evening, we are making extra efforts to make sure that people

are staying at home. People are not allowed to go out of their houses. You can't go for a 10-meter jog. You can't go for a walk to see the next-door neighbors. For this specific part of the festival, until tomorrow evening, everybody is in lockdown. The only people you'll see on the streets, if you walk around with me now on a foot patrol or drive-around, are police officers, who have cordoned off cities and cordoned off neighborhoods.



Micky Rosenfeld, left, with a patrol unit

This decision was made based on what took place during the Jewish festival of Purim several weeks ago. In that holiday, there's a significant meal that takes place where all the families get together. Unfortunately, that's when many contracted the COVID-19 virus, directly as a result of families coming together and celebrating together.

After this HHS guidance was released, the **Bedford, NH Police Department** was able to receive a list of positive COVID-19 patients from the state Department of Health and Human Services.¹¹⁸ The **Volusia County, FL Sheriff's Office** faced challenges until the Florida Surgeon General directed health officials to provide Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), or 911 centers, with daily COVID-19 updates. With this information, the Sheriff's Office could enter addresses associated with someone who had tested positive into the CAD system. Deputies would then be aware if they were responding to a location where someone had tested positive. It also allowed the agency to track whether a deputy may have been in contact with anyone who tested positive in the past 30 days.¹¹⁹

Despite the federal guidance, some jurisdictions chose to restrict public safety access to data on active COVID-19 cases. The Cook County, IL Board President vetoed a measure that would share this information to first responders through PSAPs, citing concerns of public health officials and the potential for discrimination.¹²⁰

COVID-19: The #1 Cause of Death To Police Officers

In 2020 and 2021, COVID-related deaths of police officers and sheriffs' deputies outnumbered deaths from all other line-of-duty causes combined, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page.

In 2020, there were 384 line-of-duty deaths, and 253 of these deaths were due to COVID, compared to

Officer Down Memorial Page. Some of the officers who died of COVID-19.



118. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Managing emergency communications centers." April 2, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril2>

119. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interviews with Florida chiefs and sheriffs." March 27, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch27>

120. WBBM News Radio. May 26, 2020. "Preckwinkle Issues Veto of Resolution to Share Addresses of COVID-Positive Individuals with First Responders." <https://www.audacy.com/wbbm780/articles/preckwinkle-issues-veto-to-share-covid-positive-addresses>

50 deaths by gunfire, the second most frequent cause of death.¹²¹ In other words, 66% of all line-of-duty deaths were caused by COVID. In 2021, that trend continued, with a total of 444 line-of-duty deaths as of December 8, 292 of which were due to COVID, compared to 60 deaths by gunfire.¹²²

Agencies also lost professional staff members of their agencies to COVID-19 who are not included in this count. The NYPD has lost 70 members of the department, a large number of whom were professional staff members.¹²³

Police chaplains report that they are dealing with a range of issues and stresses among department personnel, including increased use of alcohol and even PTSD in some cases.¹²⁴ The pandemic brought challenges not only for police employees, but also for their families who are trying to juggle work, child care, school, and parenting. Chaplains are having to spend more time tending to the needs of family members.

Chaplains are working closely with employee assistance programs, peer counseling, and other department resources to manage the range of issues that police personnel are facing.

Ensuring the Mental and Emotional Wellness of First Responders

While the physical health of officers was an immediate concern during the pandemic, many police agencies quickly recognized that COVID-19 would also take a toll on their personnel's mental and emotional well-being. This is a concern not only for police officers, but also for others who experience the stress of dealing with COVID-related issues day after day, including correctional officers, medical personnel, and paramedics. There is concern that the full impact on first responders will not be known for a long time after the pandemic ends.

Some law enforcement leaders have likened the impact of COVID-19 to that of 9/11. In New York City, the police department saw an increase in officer suicides and psychological and emotional treatment needs about 18 months after 9/11.¹²⁵ Similar concerns are being expressed about medical professionals who have been treating COVID-19 patients, with the expectation that once the intensity of responding to the largest waves of the pandemic wanes, first responders will be faced with confronting the emotional toll of working in such a sustained period of trauma and stress.¹²⁶

When asked in March 2020 if anything in his career could have prepared him for the COVID-19 pandemic, New York City Police Commissioner Dermot Shea said,

“9/11 is the event that I would compare it to, although it’s very different in some ways. The similarity is that on 9/11, I remember thinking, ‘I’ll never see anything like this again.’ I’ve never seen anything like the COVID-19 crisis before. But it’s a completely different experience in that you knew what 9/11 was, and it was somewhat contained after the first days and weeks. For some people, their jobs went back to normal after a month.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is a strange experience. The strange part isn’t only that no one is out on the street. It’s that we’re planning for the unknown. That makes it difficult. Is this pandemic going to last two weeks, two months, or a year?”¹²⁷

The **Aurora, IL Police Department** recognized the need for increased mental health programs and peer mentoring following a February 2019 mass shooting in their community. The department has since bolstered its programs and resources, including a mobile phone app available to officers that connects them with a mental health professional immediately and anonymously. During the pandemic, the Aurora

121. Officer Down Memorial Page. “Honoring Officers Killed in 2020.” <https://www.odmp.org/search/year?year=2020>

122. Officer Down Memorial Page. “Honoring Officers Killed in 2021.” <https://www.odmp.org/search/year?year=2021>

123. NYPD COVID-19 Memorial video. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/about/memorials/covid-19-memorial.page>

124. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “How police chaplains are supporting officers and civilian employees during the pandemic.” January 27, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid27jan21>

125. ABC News. “Law enforcement groups urge mental health awareness amid coronavirus.” May 15, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/law-enforcement-groups-urge-mental-health-awareness-amid/story?id=70667340>

126. New York Times. “‘I Can’t Turn My Brain Off’: PTSD and Burnout Threaten Medical Workers.” May 16, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/16/health/coronavirus-ptsd-medical-workers.html>

127. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interviews with NYPD leaders.” March 26, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch26>

Police Department worked to “over-communicate” with officers about the resources available. The department also created a platform where officers can anonymously provide feedback to command staff as well as any concerns or criticisms.¹²⁸

The **Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD)** also focused on providing constant communication to officers about positive cases in the department and other updates, recognizing the need to keep officers informed for their own peace of mind. The 16 psychologists in LAPD’s Behavioral Science Services section provided “Telehealth” sessions to members of the department.¹²⁹

The **Hennepin County, MN Sheriff’s Office’s (HSCO)** Tri Wellness program was established in 2019 to address the mental, physical, and spiritual health of HSCO’s employees.¹³⁰ During COVID-19, this program disseminated information to employees about how stress manifests differently in people, coping tips, and resources for first responders and their families. These resources included county services, virtual meetings and support groups, and mental health and crisis help line numbers.

Chaplaincy units also adapted to the pandemic to ensure they would still be able to provide services to first responders. Police chaplains reached out to offer assistance to agency members who were suffering during the pandemic, using video conferencing, FaceTime, and text messages. Some chaplains continued to ride with officers and deputies on patrol, so they would remain available as a resource for first responders in the field. The chaplaincy program at the **Harris County, TX Sheriff’s Office** put together care packages that could be delivered to employees who were exposed to COVID-19 and were isolating, either at home or in hotels provided by the agency.¹³¹

Chaplains also provided assistance to officers and deputies who responded to weeks or months of demonstrations in 2020 following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Rev. Joan Austin of the **Minneapolis Police Department** not only talked to officers about the impact of the demonstrations, but also about the exodus of officers who left the agency or left the policing profession in 2020.¹³²

Rev. Jonathan Recaberren of the **NYPD** explained the importance of being visible to officers during this time, saying,

“We used Zoom at the beginning of the pandemic, and it served its purpose to be there for them as funeral services were held and for extended condolences. But when the protests began, I needed to physically be there. Members of the service were dealing with a lot of hostility, and their lives were on the line. It really boosted their morale to know that they weren’t in this alone.”¹³³

In addition to providing formal programs and resources, many leaders of police agencies made a point to check in with their officers frequently during the pandemic.

- Chief Paul Pazen of the **Denver Police Department** asked Dr. John Nicoletti, a police psychologist, to conduct a wellness check with every officer in the department to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on their work, on the officers themselves, and on their families.¹³⁴
- The **Miami Police Department** also conducted check-ins with officers who quarantined. A designated team conducted these check-ins on a daily basis throughout an officer’s quarantine.¹³⁵

128. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Officer wellness during the pandemic.” April 23, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril23>

129. Ibid.

130. Mspmag.com. “Hennepin County Sheriff Dave Hutchinson on the Department’s Tri Wellness Unit.” February 19, 2021. <https://mspmag.com/arts-and-culture/dave-hutchinson-hennepin-county-sheriff/>

131. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “How police chaplains are supporting officers and civilian employees during the pandemic.” January 27, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid27jan21>

132. Ibid.

133. Ibid.

134. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interviews with Police Psychologist Dr. John Nicoletti and Castle Rock, CO Chief Jack Cauley.” May 19, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay19>

135. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Officer wellness during the pandemic.” April 23, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril23>

Providing Off-Duty Support To Officers and Their Families

Police officers and sheriffs' deputies are accustomed to thinking about the level of risk they face in performing their duties. But COVID-19 was a new type of concern, because officers not only had to consider their own risk of contracting the coronavirus, but also the possibility that if they became infected, they might inadvertently infect their family members. For many first responders, this was a significant concern and source of stress.

To alleviate some of the fears of transmitting COVID-19 to loved ones, many police agencies created quarantine space for officers who had been exposed to the virus.

- The **Seattle Police Department** found alternative housing for officers who needed to quarantine themselves. This work was coordinated by the department's Wellness Services Unit, which also coordinated care packages and food delivery for officers in isolation and their families.¹³⁶
- The **Irving, TX Police Department** identified two housing alternatives. First, officers who believed they were exposed to COVID-19 and were worried about exposing their families were allowed to quarantine at local hotels. Second, officers whom the department knew to be or were suspected of being exposed to COVID-19 could isolate at a local recreation center that the agency opened for that purpose.¹³⁷
- The **Santa Cruz, CA Police Department** allowed officers to quarantine at local hotels when directed to by their doctors. In these instances, the department covered the cost of the hotel and provided meals to the quarantined officers.¹³⁸
- At the **Los Angeles Police Department's** Police Academy, the department developed a Rest and Recovery area for officers who were worried about going home and exposing their loved ones to the virus. At the academy, officers could shower, sleep, and even get a haircut. For quarantine purposes, officers were also able to stay at a designated hotel for two weeks.¹³⁹

Agencies also included families of officers/deputies in their **peer support** efforts.¹⁴⁰

- The **Clearwater, FL Police Department** has a Family Support Liaison who provides officers' families with support and information about employment benefits, protective equipment, and how the department was handling COVID-19 exposures.
- The **Boston Police Department's** Peer Support Unit offers a wide array of services to members of the department, including access to clinical staff, peer support personnel, information on how to help children with coping mechanisms, and other resources. Everything offered to members of the department was also available to their immediate family members.

Financial strain was another concern for first responders and their families, especially in light of the severe impacts that COVID-19 had on the economy and employment. Many jurisdictions explored hazardous-duty pay for front-line workers, including law enforcement personnel. In **Flint, MI**, officers received \$1,200 and other eligible staff in the department received \$750.¹⁴¹

Chaplaincy units adjusted to the pandemic by providing resources to officers' family members, and

136. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Addressing officer safety concerns and changes to training programs." March 24, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch24>

137. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interviews with police executives and officer wellness resources." March 23, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch23>

138. City of Santa Cruz, Memorandum, Police Department. "Standard Operating Procedure regarding COVID-19." March 23, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/Santa%20Cruz%20Covid19%20SOP.pdf>

139. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Officer wellness during the pandemic." April 23, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril23>

140. Ibid.

141. Mlive.com. "Flint City Council approves hazardous-duty pay for front-line workers during coronavirus crisis." May 14, 2020. <https://www.mlive.com/news/flint/2020/05/flint-city-council-approves-hazardous-duty-pay-for-front-line-workers-during-coronavirus-crisis.html>

some chaplains reported an increase in calls from concerned family members during the pandemic. For example, the **San Diego Police Department's** wellness unit can respond to a family member's concerns at any time of the day to provide resources.¹⁴²

Vaccinating Officers

Toward the end of 2020, it was announced that several COVID-19 vaccines were close to receiving emergency use authorization from the FDA. For many, this signaled that the pandemic might finally start to wane, and usher in a return to normalcy. The arrival of vaccines also posed another logistical challenge for police agencies nationwide. Agencies had to plan for how to obtain and distribute vaccines to their personnel, and also how to combat vaccine hesitancy among some officers. Because officers remained engaged with the public throughout the pandemic, vaccines became a significant officer safety and wellness priority.

Vaccine Distribution Logistics

Although three vaccines had received emergency use authorization by the end of February 2021, they initially proved hard to obtain in some localities. Each state had different supply levels and developed their own plans for prioritizing the distribution of the vaccine. In Massachusetts, for example, police personnel were included in the first priority group.¹⁴³ However, in Ohio, police personnel were in the third priority group to receive access to the vaccine.¹⁴⁴ Police agencies had to track their states' vaccination distribution plan as a starting point for creating their own plan.

In London, **Metropolitan Police Commissioner** Cressida Dick publicly said she was "baffled" by the government's decision not to give police officers any priority status for receiving COVID vaccines.

"In many other countries, police officers and law enforcement colleagues are being prioritized, and I want my officers to get the vaccine," she said.¹⁴⁵ She said there had been 97 "disgusting" incidents in which people intentionally coughed at officers after saying they were COVID-positive or otherwise mentioned it, and 48 incidents where people intentionally spat at officers. "We've charged 126 people with that, and nearly two-thirds of them have got custodial sentences," Commissioner Dick said. At that time, in January 2021, three members of the Metropolitan Police Service had died of COVID.

There was variation in how closely involved police agencies were in rolling out the vaccine to their personnel. Some agencies developed their own distribution plans and schedules and arranged for vaccination clinics at police facilities, while others simply encouraged their members to get vaccinated when eligible. For agencies that created distribution plans, factors to consider included how to prioritize the rollout among their agency personnel, with high priority given to officers who had the most frequent contacts with the public, jail inmates, and other potentially high-risk people. Another factor that some agencies considered was staggering appointments, to reduce the impact in case some officers had side effects from the vaccines and might need time off to recover.

Many agencies followed the lead of the states and created priority lists for vaccinations within their departments. The **St. Mary's County, MD Sheriff's Office**, for example, had a three-tier system:

- Tier 1 – Jail personnel and front-line patrol personnel.
- Tier 2 – Remaining patrol administration, Special Operations Division, investigations divisions, corrections administration, vice and narcotics unit, and the medical staff at the jail.

142. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "How police chaplains are supporting officers and civilian employees during the pandemic." January 27, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid27jan21>

143. Mass.gov. "Phased vaccine distribution plan." <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-vaccination-phases#phase-1>

144. Ohio Department of Health. "COVID-19 Vaccine Fact Sheet: Priority Populations and Vaccine Distribution." https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/vaccine/general_fact_sheet.pdf

145. The Guardian. "Met chief 'baffled' by lack of Covid vaccines for police." January 19, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jan/19/cressida-dick-covid-vaccines-police-spit-attacks>



Charleston, SC Lt. Timothy Dasher receiving his second vaccine

- Tier 3 – Office of Professional Responsibilities, remaining administrative staff, and professional staff.¹⁴⁶

In addition to creating access tiers, many agencies also scheduled vaccinations by shift. The **Lowell, MA Police Department** took advantage of its normal 4-days-on, 2-days-off schedule by having officers receive the shot on their last day they were on duty. In that way, they had two days off to recover from any side effects. Officers who were unable to be vaccinated on their last day on duty were not charged sick time if they had to take off due to side effects.¹⁴⁷

Agencies also factored into their rollout plans where the vaccines would be administered.¹⁴⁸

- Officers from the **Janesville, WI Police Department** were able to receive the vaccine from a local hospital with whom the department had a good working relationship.

- The **Austin, TX Police Department** was able to administer the vaccine to officers within the city’s shared public safety wellness center.
- The **New Castle County, DE Police Department**, in partnership with the EMS personnel who share the same building, set up a mobile hospital in a parking lot where officers could receive the vaccine.
- Members of the **Los Angeles Police Department** were able to receive the vaccine administered by members of the Los Angeles Fire Department at four fire stations that had been designated as testing and vaccination sites.¹⁴⁹

Vaccinations of Professional Staff Members

As states released their plans for priority distribution of the vaccine, there was a question about whether police agencies’ professional staff members would be considered eligible for the vaccine at the same time as their officer counterparts. In addition to questions of fairness, police executives expressed concern that police operations would be negatively impacted if a large number of professional staff were out due to the virus, just as they would if a large number of officers contracted the virus.

Access to the vaccine for professional staff members varied by state. In Massachusetts, professional staff members were not given priority access alongside sworn personnel. To ensure that professional staff members were as well protected as possible, the **Lowell, MA Police Department** sent out reminders to vaccinated officers to continue wearing face masks around professional staff.¹⁵⁰

146. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Vaccine distribution to agency personnel.” December 29, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/coviddec29>

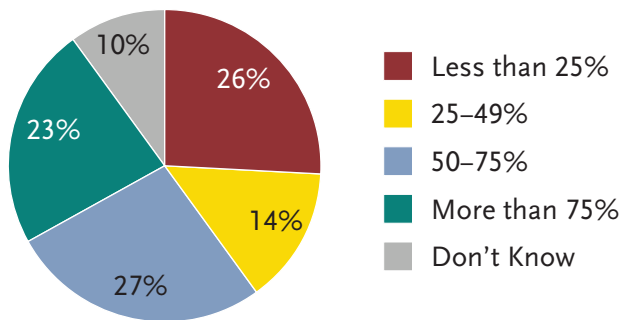
147. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, “Agencies that have vaccinated a high percentage of their employees and spring break in Miami Beach.” March 25, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues25mar21>

148. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interviews with Austin, TX Chief Brian Manley, Janesville, WI Chief David Moore, and New Castle County, DE Major Wendi Feeser about vaccine distribution.” January 12, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid12jan21>

149. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Vaccinations in the Los Angeles Fire Department and the Israel Police.” February 4, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid4feb21>

150. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, “Agencies that have vaccinated a high percentage of their employees and spring break in Miami Beach.” March 25, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues25mar21>

Percent of Professional Staff Who Have Received Vaccine So Far (March 2021) n=239



PERF Survey, "Police Employee Vaccinations"¹⁵¹

This uneven prioritization of professional staff resulted in agencies reporting that fewer of their professional staff were receiving vaccines early on, when compared to sworn personnel. In a March 2021 PERF survey, 26% of respondents indicated that fewer than 25% of their professional staff members had been vaccinated. By contrast, only 7% of responding agencies reported that fewer than 25% of their officers had received a vaccine.

The Denver Police Department's Role In Testing the Moderna Vaccine

In November 2020, three companies announced positive results from the clinical trials of their COVID-19 vaccines. Clinical trials are a vital component of testing the safety and effectiveness of vaccines, and these trials are made possible by volunteers who agree to participate.

Because the purpose is to compare the health outcomes of people who receive the vaccine with others who do not receive the vaccine, some participants receive the vaccine while others do not, and participants are not told whether they are receiving the vaccine or a placebo.

And because clinical trials are conducted before the vaccines are approved for emergency use or general use, volunteers do not have the same information about potential side effects that the general population will later be given, as they decide whether to receive the vaccine.¹⁵²

Despite these concerns, thousands of individuals signed up to participate in these trials, knowing that the development of effective vaccines was essential to ending the pandemic.

In the summer of 2020, many volunteers for testing the Moderna vaccine came from the **Denver Police Department (DPD)**. After hearing that UCHHealth in Denver was participating in the Moderna study, Denver Police Chief Paul Pazen contacted the health care network to see if they would accept volunteers from the department. Given the diversity of DPD employees and the fact that officers were at high risk for contracting COVID-19 due to their work as first responders, police leaders believed they would be good candidates for the trial, and the Moderna researchers agreed.¹⁵³

DPD leaders' top priority for participation in the trial was the safety of officers. Chief Pazen gathered information about the Moderna vaccine to ensure that participation in the trial would not put members of the department or their families in jeopardy.

DPD also coordinated with union officials about participation in the clinical trial. Detective Nick Rogers, President of the Denver Police Protective Association, volunteered to be part of the trial, and said he didn't see vaccines as a labor-vs.-management issue, but rather as an officer safety issue.

At the time of the trial, the volunteers did not know whether they received the vaccine or a placebo. Later, the study was made "unblind," so that those who received the placebo would know they should receive the vaccine when it was made generally available.

The fact that Chief Pazen and Detective Rogers endorsed the trial and personally volunteered to

151. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "Survey on police employee vaccinations." March 23, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues23mar21>

152. Michigan Health. "COVID-19 Vaccine Trial Volunteers Explain Why They Signed Up." November 17, 2020. <https://healthblog.uofmhealth.org/wellness-prevention/covid-19-vaccine-trial-volunteers-explain-why-they-signed-up>

153. 9News.com. "Denver officers, police chief enroll in COVID vaccine trial." December 4, 2020. <https://www.9news.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/denver-police-chief-officers-enroll-covid-vaccine-trial/73-0b97ff2a-eb97-4f2a-b63f-edd3eb4cf00a>

receive the vaccine helped to build trust in the vaccine. In total, 144 members of the department volunteered to participate in the study.¹⁵⁴ Later, when vaccines were approved for general use, the Denver Police Department had a higher-than-average vaccination rate, with 82% of members receiving the Moderna or other vaccines.

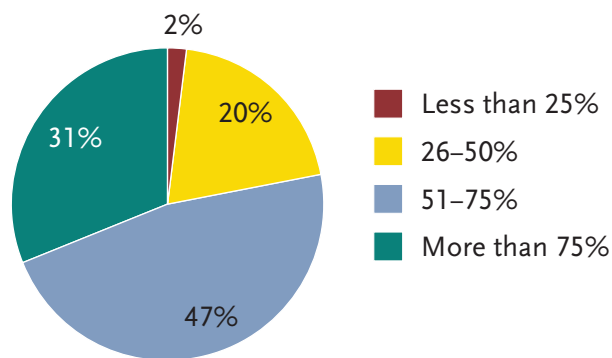
Combatting Vaccine Hesitancy In Law Enforcement Agencies

In December 2020, PERF surveyed its members to get a better understanding of how police agencies were planning to roll out the vaccine and what expectations they had for the process. Of the 192 responding agencies, 31% estimated that more than three-quarters of their personnel would get vaccinated, and 47% estimated half to three-quarters would get vaccinated. In an effort to foster greater vaccination rates, 66% planned to undertake an internal campaign to encourage members to get vaccinated.¹⁵⁵

In early March 2021, PERF again surveyed its members to gauge the progress agencies had made in vaccinating their personnel. 240 agencies responded, and 78% were tracking how many members of their agencies were getting vaccinated. The findings appeared positive. 54% of the responding agencies reported that more than half of their sworn personnel had *already* been vaccinated. This was impressive, considering that vaccines were not yet widely available in early March, even for high-priority groups. Only 7% of agencies reported that fewer than 25% of their officers had been vaccinated.¹⁵⁶

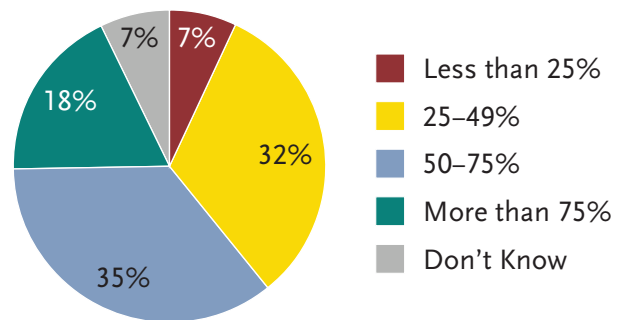
Many police agencies worked to increase vaccination rates among their staff. One of the most common methods was to disseminate information about the vaccine from trusted sources. Some agencies used the latest information from the CDC, while others also used information from local medical professionals. Agencies held mandatory meetings and trainings, sent emails, and held webinars and Q&A sessions to ensure that officers had all of the information they needed to make an informed decision.

Approximately What Percentage of Members of Your Agency Do You Anticipate Will Want to Be Vaccinated? (n=192)



PERF December 2020 Vaccine Survey

Percent of Sworn Personnel Who Have Received Vaccine So Far (n=239)



PERF March 2021 Vaccine Survey

154. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Interview with Denver Chief Paul Pazen about his agency’s participation in the Moderna vaccine study.” November 30, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidnov30>

155. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Survey: What police executives are expecting with coronavirus vaccines.” December 21, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/coviddec21>

156. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, “Survey on police employee vaccinations.” March 23, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues23mar21>

Agency executives also led by example by getting the vaccines themselves, publicly in some instances. In PERF's March 2021 survey, most of the survey respondents were the chief executives of their agencies, and 87% of them reported having received a COVID-19 vaccine.

- **St. Mary's County, MD Sheriff Tim Cameron** was one of the first to receive a vaccine as part of the county's rollout, which included prominent community members receiving the vaccine to reassure the community about its safety.¹⁵⁷
- **Fort Smith, AK Police Chief Danny Baker** also received the vaccine on camera, in an effort to encourage his officers to do the same. Chief Baker explained to a local news station why he was doing so, saying, "I understand the apprehension that exists. [But] personal health ... and officer wellness always have been a priority for us, and I don't see this as any different."¹⁵⁸

Many agencies were directly involved in coordinating vaccine appointments for their personnel, and some took steps to make the vaccination process as easy as possible. This included allowing officers

and deputies to get vaccinated while on duty, or to use overtime to attend their appointments.

Other agencies offered incentives to encourage their members to get vaccinated. These included monetary incentives, such as gift cards, and additional leave time. In accordance with CDC guidelines, agencies also relaxed some COVID-19 precautions for those who had been vaccinated. In some agencies, vaccinated personnel were allowed to participate in non-mandatory training that had been suspended throughout the pandemic, and vaccinated personnel could also resume business travel. The **Cambridge, MA Police Department** allowed vaccinated personnel to use the department's gym, which had been closed.¹⁵⁹ That proved to be a popular incentive.

Agencies also cautioned personnel about how the decision to not get vaccinated might have negative effects. Throughout the pandemic, many agencies did not charge officers sick leave if they contracted COVID-19, but after the vaccines were available, officers in some agencies were charged sick leave if they contracted the virus after declining the vaccine.

RIGHT: Fort Smith, AK Police Chief Danny Baker

FAR RIGHT: Israel Police Facebook



157. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Vaccine distribution to agency personnel." December 29, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/coviddec29>

158. 4029tv.com. "Fort Smith police chief hopes to lead by example for getting COVID-19 vaccine." Jan. 28, 2021. <https://www.4029tv.com/article/fort-smith-police-chief-hopes-to-lead-by-example-for-getting-covid-19-vaccine/35356224>

159. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Recap of PERF's webinar about vaccinations." February 18, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/covid18feb21>

Some Cities and States Impose Vaccine Mandates as Vaccination Rates Plateau

When vaccines were first made available, most police agencies were wary about *requiring* officers or professional staff members to receive a vaccine. In PERF's December 2020 survey, only 3% of respondents indicated that they would make the vaccines mandatory.¹⁶⁰

However, by July and August 2021, when it was becoming clear that vaccination rates were not high enough to reach herd immunity in the United States, a rapidly growing number of local, state, and federal government agencies were adopting mandates that public employees, including police personnel, get vaccinated. New York City and State, the State of California, the city of San Francisco, and several counties in the Bay Area were among the first to announce that their employees would be required to get vaccinated.¹⁶¹

Police unions in many jurisdictions were resisting vaccine mandates, threatening to file lawsuits to prevent them from taking effect.¹⁶² However, as of October 2021, most lawsuits were not succeeding in stopping the vaccine mandates.¹⁶³

In some agencies, such as the San Francisco Police Department, vaccination rates among officers reached 80% or more. But rates were much lower in other agencies, even though hundreds of officers nationwide were continuing to die from COVID-19 (see page 42).

In Norwood, MA, Police Chief Bill Brooks issued an order requiring his officers to receive vaccinations by August 31, 2021. "I have one officer who is pursuing a medical exemption," he told PERF. "The others are all getting their shots."¹⁶⁴

Chief Brooks said he views vaccinations not only as an officer safety issue, but as a public safety issue. "The week before the order was issued, I was making my rounds on foot patrol talking to people, and three times, senior citizens asked me if our officers were vaccinated," he said. "It struck me that they were concerned that if they called 911, an officer who was infected might respond. So it became very clear to me that the public was concerned about this issue."

John Camper, Director of the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, sent a message to his officers and professional staff about the importance of vaccines.¹⁶⁵

"What kind of Chief would I be if I didn't put citizen and officer safety at the very top of my priority list?" Director Camper wrote. "What kind of Chief would I be if I didn't equip my officers with the tactical training and weaponry that they need to face the dangers of increasingly high-risk calls? If I didn't mandate that my officers wear ballistic vests to protect themselves, despite the cost and the hassle and the discomfort? Knowing that COVID-19 killed more cops last year than all other causes combined, to include traffic accidents and being shot, what kind of Chief would I be if I didn't consider it to be the singular most critical officer safety issue of our time?"

160. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Survey: What police executives are expecting with coronavirus vaccines." December 21, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/coviddec21>

161. See, for example:

"New York City and California to Require Vaccines or Tests for Workers," New York Times, July 26, 2021.

"N.Y.P.D. to Unvaccinated Officers: Wear Masks or Face Discipline," New York Times, Aug. 19, 2021.

"Coronavirus cases spiking in LAPD as some officers skirt vaccine mandate," Los Angeles Times, Aug. 26, 2021.

"Lightfoot to impose vaccine mandate for city employees," Chicago Sun-Times, Aug. 23, 2021.

"San Diego mandating all city workers be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by Nov. 2," San Diego Union-Tribune. 162. See " 'Hell no': Some police officers and their unions oppose vaccination mandates." NBC News, Aug. 27, 2021.

163. "New York City's biggest police union sues over the city's vaccine mandate," New York Times, October 25, 2021.

164. "PERF Trending: Where is the sense of urgency about COVID deaths of police officers?" September 4, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/trending4sep21>

165. Ibid.

Commissioner Dermot Shea on How COVID Impacted NYC

PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler interviewed New York City Police Commissioner Dermot Shea on five occasions during the first year of the pandemic. No department was harder hit by COVID than the NYPD, particularly in the early months of the pandemic. The course of the pandemic can be traced in these five interviews, excerpted below:

March 26, 2020

Commissioner Shea: New York State currently accounts for more than half of the known coronavirus cases in the United States, and New York City has more than half of the cases in all of New York State.

I'd advise other departments to take your personnel allocations extremely seriously. We've emptied our headquarters out. In offices that don't empty out, when one person gets the virus, everyone gets it.

The strange part isn't just that no one is out on the street. It's that we're planning for the unknown. That makes it difficult. Is this pandemic going to last two weeks, two months, or a year? You have to prepare for the worst. You can always pull back, but you don't want to be trying to catch up.¹⁶⁶

April 17, 2020

Less than one month later, the NYPD had lost 27 members to COVID-19. Wexler asked Commissioner Shea what leadership looks like during a pandemic.



Commissioner Shea: You don't have to have all the answers, but you have to make the hard calls. You do the best you can. In the NYPD, there's an awful lot of moving parts, with 56,000 people, all the interconnections with different agencies, and different law enforcement partners offering to help. Keep your sight on moving forward, and keep your sight on the big picture, on what's really important to the city.¹⁶⁷

September 11, 2020

On the 19th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Wexler asked Commissioner Shea if he saw any parallels between that disaster and the COVID pandemic.

Commissioner Shea: There's a parallel, because you have to fight to get through both of them, and there's certainly the need for resilience and a lot of rebuilding. But they are very different circumstances. 9/11 was an instantaneous shock to the country. We lost 23 members of the NYPD. The Fire Department

166. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interviews with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea, First Deputy Commissioner Benjamin Tucker, and Chief of Department Terry Monahan." March 26, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch26>

167. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interview with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea." April 17, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril17>

lost over 300. And it rocked the country into war. New York City, particularly Lower Manhattan, was devastated.

COVID has been a different kind of fight. We've lost 46 members of the NYPD, and we're still in the COVID pandemic.

The parallel I draw is that you see the best in people at the worst of times. You see the work that is being done on a daily basis.¹⁶⁸

October 15, 2020

By October, many cities and states were experiencing conflicts between people who wanted to reopen businesses and cultural institutions, and others who supported tighter rules to reduce the continuing spread of the virus. In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered a tightening of rules on schools, businesses, and religious gatherings, which created an uproar and disturbances in Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods of Brooklyn.

Commissioner Shea: The Governor and the Mayor tried to get their arms around the best method to control the rate of transmission, and it falls on the police in how we accomplish that. A lot of people are calling on us to issue summonses for violations, but I see our way through this as education. Our goal is to keep people safe and avoid having people get sick unnecessarily. We want people to stop



the large gatherings and follow the executive orders. We try to do that with the right touch, so that we can get voluntary compliance.¹⁶⁹

March 17, 2021

Wexler: What are your reflections on the pandemic as we pass the one-year anniversary of New York City declaring a state of emergency?

Commissioner Shea: It's like it just won't go away at this point. 52 members of the NYPD have passed away.¹⁷⁰ Of course things are better today than a year ago, but the NYPD has three people in the hospital right now.

It's been a long journey. The vaccines are here, and we're vaccinating members of the department. This week New York is giving vaccines to residents in the housing authority. That ties into building trust and community relations. God willing, the whole country will get back to some sense of normalcy soon regarding COVID.¹⁷¹

168. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interview with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea about 9/11, COVID-19, and crime." September 15, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissuessep15>

169. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "Interview with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea." October 15, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissuesoct15>

170. By October 2021, 70 members of the NYPD had died of COVID-19.

171. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "Interview with NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea." March 17, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues17mar21>

CHAPTER 3:

How COVID-19 Impacted Crime And the Work of Policing

ALTHOUGH SOME POLICE OPERATIONS WERE curtailed during the COVID-19 pandemic, core functions essential to public safety can never be suspended. During the pandemic, police also took on new responsibilities. This chapter discusses new roles that police departments and sheriffs' offices were given, or that they chose to take on, including the following:

- **Responding to violent crime and other serious offenses**, while reducing their in-person response to lesser offenses in order to reduce the spread of COVID;
- **Assisting vulnerable populations**, including domestic violence victims who were at greater risk because of pandemic conditions; vulnerable children; and persons experiencing homelessness during the pandemic;
- **Engaging with other law enforcement departments, public health agencies, and others** to create a regional response to the pandemic.

Crime and the Police Response

Early Warnings of Changing Crime Patterns During the Pandemic

At the start of the pandemic, many agencies saw a decrease in their calls for service. In April 2020, the **New York City Police Department** reported that calls for service had declined by 25% since the start of the pandemic.¹⁷² A preliminary study of calls for service in 10 cities during the early months of the pandemic found the frequency of calls decreased in most of the studied cities, following the closure of schools and the implementation of stay-at-home orders.¹⁷³

But crime did not stop during the pandemic, and police agencies still had to respond to and investigate crimes. Some police agencies reported that some types of crime, such as residential burglaries, decreased in the early months of the pandemic. With many people working from home, there were fewer opportunities to burglarize residential properties. On the other hand, burglaries of businesses increased, especially businesses that had closed because of the pandemic.

172. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Supporting and managing officers out sick." April 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril7>

173. Ashby, Matthew P.J. (2020). "Changes in Police Calls for Service During the Early Months of the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic." *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 14(4), p. 1054-1072. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paaa037>

Another early indication of changing crime patterns was that some agencies noticed increases in domestic violence, likely triggered by COVID-related stresses such as job loss and disruption of living patterns, with abusers more likely to be at home for most of the day.

Sharp spikes in violent crime: In the summer and fall of 2020, PERF was hearing reports of sharp increases in homicides and shootings in many cities. By the spring of 2021, that trend had solidified, with many cities reporting increases of 30% or more in these violent offenses.

This section provides a general overview of how the pandemic impacted crime. It includes preliminary crime data from police agencies, news media reporting, and summaries of early research that has been conducted on the subject. Time and further research are needed to fully understand how crime was impacted by the events of 2020 and 2021.

Homicides, Shootings, and Carjackings Increased

New York City was one of the first cities to report a dramatic increase in shootings in May 2020. Compared to May 2019, shootings increased by 64%.¹⁷⁴ The following month, the city saw a 130% increase in shootings when compared to June 2019.¹⁷⁵

Interim Chief Susan Manheimer of the **Oakland, CA Police Department** also reported an increase in shootings and homicides, which she attributed to gang disputes during the shelter-in-place order, the release of individuals who had been arrested for gun offenses during the pandemic, and the early release of inmates without social support.¹⁷⁶

PERF's fall 2020 survey shows a 28% increase in homicides: In November 2020, PERF surveyed its members about crime trends they were seeing. This information, combined with data collected by the Major Cities Chiefs Association, showed large increases in homicides and aggravated assaults in many jurisdictions in January-September 2020, when compared to January-September 2019.¹⁷⁷

Among the 223 police agencies studied, which included a mix of small, medium, and large departments, 58% of respondents reported an increase in homicides. The total number of homicides in those 223 agencies was 7,158 in the first nine months of 2020, compared to 5,583 during the same period of 2019 – a 28% increase.

Similarly, among the 223 police agencies, two-thirds reported an increase in aggravated assaults. The 223 agencies reported a total of 250,067 aggravated assaults in 2020, compared to 228,843 such offenses in 2019 – a 9% increase.

PERF's summer 2021 survey: PERF conducted a second survey in August 2021, in which we asked agencies to provide their crime data for January through July 2021, and to provide the comparable data for the same seven-month period in 2020.¹⁷⁸

This new survey revealed that among the responding departments:

- Homicides increased 12% in January-July 2021, compared to the same period in 2020;
- Aggravated assaults increased 5%;
- Shootings increased 16%; and
- Carjackings increased 16%.

174. NYPD. "NYPD Announces Citywide Crime Statistics for May 2020." <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/p0618a/nypd-citywide-crime-statistics-may-2020>

175. NYPD. "NYPD Announces Citywide Crime Statistics for June 2020." <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/pr0706/nypd-citywide-crime-statistics-june-2020>

176. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "Interview with Oakland Interim Chief Susan Manheimer." October 14, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissuesoct14>

177. PERF Daily Critical Issues Report, "New data on increasing violent crime rates." November 18, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissuesnov18>

178. "PERF Special Report: Violent Crime Trends: Homicides, Shootings, and Carjackings Are Increasing in 2021; Robberies Continue to Decline." September 22, 2021. <https://www.policeforum.org/violentcrimesurveyseptember2021>

Homicides: The increases in homicides were not limited to the largest cities:

- Fresno, CA reported an increase in homicides from 22 to 45.
- Mesa, AZ saw an increase from 8 to 19.
- St. Petersburg, FL saw an increase from 10 to 22.

Aggravated assaults: The increase in aggravated assaults was found in cities in all size categories, with larger percentage increases in smaller cities such as Vail, CO and Clemson City, SC.

Shootings: The 16% increase in shootings was concentrated in the largest and smallest agencies, with medium-size departments reporting little change overall. For example:

- Portland, OR reported an increase from 392 to 752 shootings.
- Tampa, FL experienced an increase from 75 to 150 shootings.
- Thomasville, GA saw an increase from 3 to 13 shootings.

Carjackings: The 16% increase in carjackings was very concentrated in the largest cities. Small and medium-size cities overall reported decreases in carjackings. For example:

- Long Beach, CA reported 36 carjackings in the first seven months of 2021, compared to 15 in the first seven months of 2020.
- Montgomery County, MD reported an increase from 5 to 37.
- Portland, OR reported an increase from 28 to 70.

In these carjacking incidents, many of the suspects were young and repeat offenders. Common targets included delivery drivers, people warming up their cars, and ride share drivers. Some suspects violently assaulted their victims, even when the victim complied with their demands.

Robberies decreased: In both of PERF's surveys, agencies reported decreases in robberies. In the first

survey, robberies declined 11% between 2019 and 2020. In PERF's second survey, robberies decreased 8% from 2020 to 2021.

Closing of courts resulted in a lack of accountability among offenders: Many police chiefs reported that the increases in violent crime were due in part to the fact that courts and other criminal justice agencies had mostly shut down during the pandemic. With courts unable to convene juries due to the risks of COVID transmission, offenders had little incentive to plead guilty.

Release of jail inmates: Many jurisdictions also released hundreds or thousands of jail inmates, in order to free up space and keep the remaining inmates socially distanced from each other. Often, these jail inmates were released without the usual network of services that released inmates would receive, such as drug treatment. Accountability was lax at times, because probation agencies were also operating on a reduced level due to COVID-19.

Increases in Hate Incidents Targeting Asian Americans

Unfortunately, the rise in COVID-19 cases coincided with a rise in harassment towards Asian Americans across the country. With the virus originating in Wuhan, China, Asian Americans found themselves the target of harassment, intimidation, and hate crimes by individuals blaming this population for the pandemic. Political rhetoric echoing this sentiment further encouraged such targeted hate. Stop AAPI Hate tracked hate incidents during the pandemic, and reported that between March 19, 2020 and February 28, 2021, the group received 3,795 reports of harassment.¹⁷⁹

Police agencies, particularly those that serve large Asian-American communities, conducted outreach in an effort to increase the reporting of these incidents when they occur. The **San Francisco Police Department** and the **San Francisco District Attorney's Office** collaborated on a video explaining the process of reporting hate crimes.

179. Stop AAPI Hate. 2020-2021 National Report. <https://stopaapihate.org/2020-2021-national-report/>

“Hate and discrimination have no home here and should not be acceptable to any of us. I want you to know that your San Francisco Police Department and all of its members are fully committed to protecting our city’s diverse communities and investigating all hate crime allegations.”

– **Chief William Scott, San Francisco Police Department**¹⁸⁰

In the very early weeks of the pandemic, **Bellevue, WA Police Chief Stephen Mylett** expressed concern about a backlash against his city’s Chinese-American community, which makes up about one-third of the population. He noticed a sharp increase in the purchase of firearms in that community and called an emergency meeting of his Asian-Pacific Islander Advisory Council to discuss their concerns.¹⁸¹ Later, in May 2020, Chief Mylett held a virtual town hall meeting to hear accounts of hate incidents.¹⁸²

Fortunately, by March 2021, Chief Mylett reported that he hadn’t received any reports of hate crimes in Bellevue targeting Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities in 2021, although he was concerned that there might be incidents going unreported.

“Last month, we did another large Zoom community event targeting the AAPI community specifically, and I was pleased with what I *didn’t* hear,” Chief

Mylett said. “I didn’t hear firsthand experiences in Bellevue of hate and bias-related incidents. One of my employees is looped into the Chinese community specifically and the AAPI community at large through WeChat and other social media groups. If it’s happening and being talked about, my employee would know about it and report it to me. I checked with her again this morning, and we’re not hearing it.”¹⁸³

The **Oakland, CA Police Department** partnered with the **Alameda County District Attorney’s Office** to create a special response team, created the position of Chinatown liaison officer, and increased the visibility of officers in the Chinatown area.¹⁸⁴

Overall, agencies focused on conducting outreach to their Asian-American communities and on encouraging greater reporting of hate-motivated incidents towards these communities.

Assisting Vulnerable Populations

As stay-at-home orders began going into effect in March 2020, there was a growing concern for populations who were already vulnerable before the pandemic, including victims of domestic violence, children in abusive households, and individuals experiencing homelessness. Many police departments and sheriffs’ offices worked to serve these populations by increasing awareness of available services and by working with other government agencies and nonprofit organizations.



Bellevue police reached out to a person who had a politically charged message in her window.

180. San Francisco Police Department and San Francisco District Attorney’s Office. “Combating Hate Crimes.” <https://vimeo.com/409110581>

181. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Limiting in-person police responses.” March 20, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch20>

182. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Hate crimes against Asian-Americans.” May 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay7>

183. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Hate crimes and bias-related incidents against Asian-Americans.” March 16, 2021.

<https://www.policeforum.org/covid16mar21>

184. Ibid.

Domestic Violence During COVID-19

Potential increases in domestic violence incidents have been a concern for many law enforcement agencies and victim service providers throughout the pandemic. Close confinement, rising unemployment and economic uncertainty, and school and childcare closures were all seen as potential contributors to increases in domestic violence. Additionally, victim services and shelters were not able to operate at pre-pandemic capacity, resulting in more limited avenues for victims to seek assistance.¹⁸⁵

Early data indicated that domestic violence incidents increased in the first month of the pandemic. An April 2020 review found that several agencies noted increases in domestic violence calls in March 2020 when compared to March 2019:

- **San Antonio Police Department** – 18-percent increase in family violence calls.
- **Jefferson County, AL Sheriff’s Office** – 27-percent increase in domestic violence calls.
- **New York City Police Department** – 10-percent increase in domestic violence reports.¹⁸⁶

Nationally, the Gun Violence Archive found that more than 2,000 people were killed in domestic-violence-related shootings in 2020 – a 4% increase over 2019. The highest rates of these killings were found in Texas, Utah, Missouri, and Maryland.¹⁸⁷

Recognizing the increased threat of domestic violence, police agencies made exceptions to pandemic-related policy changes for domestic violence calls.¹⁸⁸

- The **Santa Cruz, CA Police Department** allowed officers to use alternatives to arrest for misdemeanor offenses, in an effort to reduce the jail

population. But domestic violence offenses and violations of domestic violence restraining orders were not included in this policy.

- The **Topeka, KS Police Department** revised its guidance on handling calls for service during the pandemic, to reduce the level of response when possible and to prevent unnecessarily risky in-person contacts between police and community members. However, domestic violence was one of six crimes requiring the highest level of police response.
- The **Alamance County, NC Sheriff’s Office** suspended all warrant service, with an exception for domestic violence warrants and issues of public safety.

Many police agencies also sought assistance from local victim service partners to ensure continuity during the pandemic.

- In the **Spokane, WA Police Department**, officers assigned to the domestic violence unit helped contact victims to maintain services when local providers and advocates were not available.¹⁸⁹
- The **Rockford, IL Police Department** coordinated with victim services to ensure that abusers could not use COVID-19 as another tool to control their victims. For example, police worked to ensure that alternatives were available to victims if the local shelter was not able to accommodate them. In coordination with the city government, police launched social media campaigns about alternative ways for victims to reach out for help, such as phone numbers that victims could text if they were not in a position to safely make a phone call.¹⁹⁰

185. Evans, Lindauer, and Farrell. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. “A Pandemic within a Pandemic — Intimate Partner Violence during Covid-19.” December 10, 2020. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2024046>

186. Boserup, McKenney, and Elkbuli. *The American Journal of Emergency Medicine*. “Alarming trends in US domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.” April 28, 2020. [https://www.ajemjournal.com/article/S0735-6757\(20\)30307-7/fulltext](https://www.ajemjournal.com/article/S0735-6757(20)30307-7/fulltext)

187. Thirteen.org. “A Handful of States Fueled a National Increase in Domestic Violence Shooting Deaths as COVID-19 Spread.” June 2, 2021. https://mcusercontent.com/c922c7933b72f97867304b913/files/08e2ef1b-ef4c-ebd0-45fb-7f51df544fdf/20210602_A_Handful_of_States_Fueled_a_National_Increase_in_Domestic_Violence_Shooting_Deaths_as_COVID_19_Spread_PBS_Frontline_Glaun.pdf

188. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, “Domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis.” April 3, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril3>

189. Ibid.

190. Ibid.

Police also ensured that victims could obtain protective orders despite court closures.

- The **Gloucester Township, NJ Police Department** helped victims obtain protective orders by facilitating remote hearings with judges using officers' department-issued phones.¹⁹¹
- The **King County, WA Prosecuting Attorney's Office** made changes to ensure that domestic violence victims would still have access to protection orders. Victims could request protection orders from the court electronically, and the state legislature passed an emergency provision to allow these orders to also be served electronically (with some exceptions if the order required the removal of a firearm or an order to vacate). Victim advocates from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office also worked with victims remotely.¹⁹²

Protecting Vulnerable Children During the Pandemic

Concerns about abuse of children were heightened during the pandemic, because children were more isolated in their homes and out of sight. With remote learning in place in many school districts, children spent more time on the internet, making them vulnerable to online sexual predators. In April 2020, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received four times the number of child cyber abuse reports than it did in April 2019.¹⁹³

For many abused children, self-reporting their abuse is not an option. For these children, mandatory reporters – persons who are required by law to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect, such as teachers, coaches, and doctors – play a critical role in identifying abused children and

obtaining assistance for them. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, children had less contact with these mandatory reporters, and the contacts that did occur were usually virtual.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office noted a 50% drop in domestic violence and child abuse complaints, a decrease it attributed mostly to children not having contacts with mandatory reporters. To increase reporting, the District Attorney's office partnered with the local grocers' association to put flyers in grocery stores encouraging individuals to report domestic violence and child abuse.¹⁹⁴

Some agencies also stepped up their outreach to vulnerable children. For example, detectives from the **Orlando, FL Police Department** taught internet safety to children at summer camps after seeing an increase in internet crimes against children during the pandemic.¹⁹⁵

Responding to Individuals Experiencing Homelessness During COVID-19

Individuals experiencing homelessness faced significant hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing requirements reduced the capacity of shelter facilities, and many homeless persons were reluctant to stay in shelters because of fears about COVID-19. And service providers had to adjust their operations in response to the pandemic, further limiting resources for individuals seeking shelter and services. Another issue was that downtown business districts in many cities suddenly resembled ghost towns, with offices, restaurants, and other businesses closed, so homeless persons had fewer locations where they could solicit assistance from the public.

191. Ibid.

192. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "How the pandemic has changed prosecutors work." May 28, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay28>

193. *Los Angeles Times*. "Online child sex abuse reports surge as kids spend more time on computers amid coronavirus." May 21, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-05-21/child-sex-abuse-and-exploitation-surge-online-amid-pandemic-overwhelming-police>

194. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "How the pandemic has changed prosecutors work." May 28, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay28>

195. *WFTV.Com*. "Orlando police teaching internet safety to children as internet crimes increase during pandemic." June 29, 2021. <https://www.wftv.com/news/local/orange-county/orlando-police-teaching-internet-safety-children-internet-crimes-increase-during-pandemic/VTY34DEEBVHQRBGSJ2NA4N3J4/>

At the start of the pandemic, many police agencies used their homeless outreach teams to provide assistance to these vulnerable populations.¹⁹⁶

- Officers in the **San Francisco Police Department**, along with other personnel assigned to the Healthy Streets Operation Center run by the Department of Homelessness and Department of Public Works, were named to a COVID-19 task force, which conducted outreach to individuals in encampments and educated them about COVID-19 and the importance of social distancing and cleanliness.
- The **Tempe, AZ Police Department** partnered with its Homeless Outreach Program (HOPE TEAM) to educate individuals experiencing homelessness about COVID-19. The City of Tempe also placed portable hand washing stations in areas where homeless individuals congregate.

Some police departments reevaluated their role in directly engaging with individuals experiencing homelessness.

- The **Long Beach, CA Police Department** and the **Seattle Police Department** removed their officers from providing security at shelters, to protect officers against possible COVID-19 exposure. (In the early months of the pandemic, as the coronavirus swept through different cities and states, one of the biggest concerns for police agencies was about taking care to ensure that particular units or even entire departments would not have to shut down because of COVID-19 infections or quarantining.)¹⁹⁷
- The **Miami Police Department** temporarily suspended its homeless outreach operations at the start of the pandemic. But once the department created protocols on how to safely conduct this work, outreach continued. The outreach work included distributing masks, offering services and shelter, and distributing other PPE to individuals experiencing homelessness.¹⁹⁸

In other departments, police personnel helped fill the gaps when health professionals were not available. **Los Angeles Police Department** officers helped staff the city's efforts to assist the 30,000+ unsheltered individuals in the city. This involved using recreation centers across the city as temporary shelters and having officers assist in transporting individuals to those facilities. LAPD officers were staffed at every shelter, and others accompanied the buses transporting individuals to the shelters. Officers also helped screen individuals about their current health status to ensure that potentially infected persons could be quarantined and given medical attention. LAPD officers also participated in multi-disciplinary groups that administered COVID-19 tests in the field, and they provided "shelter-in-place kits" that included 14 disposable masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, and a trash bag.¹⁹⁹

Further highlighting the vulnerability of individuals experiencing homelessness, the LAPD reported a 41-percent increase in homicide victims who were homeless. They also reported an increase in aggravated assaults against individuals experiencing homelessness.²⁰⁰

Multi-Agency Collaboration

Throughout 2020 and into 2021, the pandemic caused fundamental changes in the work of police and sheriffs' departments and stretched resources thin. Many agencies relied on existing partnerships and created new ways of working with other law enforcement agencies, public health and social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community partners.

With the potential for staffing shortages due to COVID-19, many agencies called upon their mutual aid agreements with neighboring public safety agencies to create a regional approach to the challenges.

196. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "The impact of COVID-19 on persons experiencing homelessness." March 30, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch30>

197. Ibid.

198. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "The police response to homelessness during the pandemic." December 7, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/coviddec7>

199. Ibid.

200. Ibid.

Coordinating a Regional Response to COVID-19

Early in the pandemic, policies and guidance from local, state, and federal governments and health officials changed rapidly. In Georgia, for example, the governor had issued 38 COVID-19-related executive orders by May 2020, and some police chiefs said that some of the orders were confusing to interpret, and difficult to enforce.²⁰¹ At times, the role of law enforcement in enforcing the guidelines was unclear. In Orange County, CA, the sheriff and county attorney argued that the governor's COVID-19 orders were unconstitutional. Local police departments, like the **Huntington Beach, CA Police Department**, were left to interpret competing guidance from local and state governments.²⁰²

In an effort to create some consistency, some agencies coordinated their response to COVID-19 guidelines with their neighboring jurisdictions. The **Pinellas County, FL Sheriff's Office** served as a central point of contact for police agencies in the county. Local police agencies would follow the lead of the Sheriff's Office in responding to issues and in implementing guidance. The Sheriff's Office also took the lead in setting definitions for different orders, which all agencies in the county could adopt and communicate to their community.²⁰³ The **San Diego County, CA Sheriff's Department**, the **San Diego Police Department**, and other local agencies took a similar approach in coordinating their messaging to ensure consistency.²⁰⁴

Coordinating Supplies and Resources

The start of the pandemic also highlighted the need for coordination regarding supplies and resources. Because of the sudden spike in the need for face masks, gloves, and other types of Personal Protective Equipment, it was often difficult for anyone to obtain supplies, including police departments. Some agencies had stockpiles of PPE and shared their resources with other departments. Some agencies worked together on searching for suppliers and acquiring PPE. In Wisconsin, agencies organized the acquisition and distribution of PPE through local and state sheriffs' and chiefs' associations and shared inventory to ensure that agencies in need received PPE.²⁰⁵

Accessing COVID-19 testing also proved difficult for some agencies early in the pandemic. Again, agencies pooled resources to increase access to COVID-19 and antibody testing in their regions. For example, the **Jefferson County, CO Sheriff's Office** purchased its own antibody test and set up a drive-through clinic open to public safety officials in the region as well as other county employees.²⁰⁶

Coordinating Staffing

The pandemic put a strain on agencies' staffing levels. Many agencies prepared for the possibility that they might lose a significant number of officers to sickness or exposure to COVID-19 at any given time. For example, the **Fort Walton Beach, FL Police Department** calculated the percentage of staff they needed to be able to function on their own, without calling in additional resources from surrounding agencies. Many agencies adjusted their staffing schedules to minimize the possibility of reaching such a critical point.²⁰⁷

201. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Reopening businesses in Georgia and South Carolina." May 5, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay5>

202. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Challenges in California, Florida, and Texas beach towns." May 6, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay6>

203. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Collaboration between police departments and sheriffs' offices." May 18, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay18>

204. Ibid.

205. Ibid.

206. Ibid.

207. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Interviews with Florida chiefs and sheriffs." March 27, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch27>

In order to ensure needed levels of staffing, agencies looked to mutual aid agreements and their neighboring jurisdictions for assistance.

- **Jefferson County, CO Sheriff Jeff Shrader** issued a Declaration of Deputization that deputized all POST-certified officers in the county in good standing with their respective agencies as deputies of the Sheriff's Office, with the intention of accelerating any calls for mutual aid assistance.²⁰⁸
- In Illinois, police departments from the villages of **Riverside, McCook, Brookfield, and North Riverside** entered into a mutual aid agreement that allowed officers to respond to calls in any of the communities. Because the region already shared a dispatch center, the process was made easier. Officers could be dispatched to calls in a neighboring village if that town did not have an available officer. Under this agreement, officers would not just respond to calls, but complete an entire investigation if needed. "We responded to everything from routine calls in each other's villages to criminal cases and prosecutions, all the way through the end of the case," Riverside Police Chief Thomas Weitzel said.²⁰⁹

Public Health Partnerships

Although many police agencies have influenza pandemic plans, the virulent and unknown nature of COVID-19 presented complex challenges unlike anything seen in the United States in more than a century. Federal public health agencies provided national guidance about how the coronavirus could be transmitted, preventive measures, and the need for lockdowns and other public health orders. But at the local level, as the pandemic spread throughout the United States, police and sheriffs' departments relied upon their local public health agencies to provide updates about local conditions and public health guidelines.

Agencies met regularly with local health partners throughout the pandemic to stay updated on the latest information about the virus and updated safety guidance. From formal partnerships through emergency operations centers (EOCs) and informal coordination efforts, police agencies maintained contact with public health partners. For example, early in the pandemic the **Dane County, WI Sheriff's Office** met with the county public health agency on a daily basis.

Data-Sharing During COVID-19

Public health agencies readily shared information on the latest health guidelines and updates on the virus. However, some police agencies found that information about infected individuals within their jurisdictions was not as easily shared.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights released guidance permitting the protected health information of individuals infected with or exposed to COVID-19 to be shared with police, paramedics, and other first responders in certain circumstances, including the following:

- **When first responders may be at risk of infection.** For example, HIPAA permits a covered county health department, in accordance with a state law, to disclose Protected Health Information (PHI) to a police officer or other person who may come into contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19, for purposes of preventing or controlling the spread of COVID-19.
- **When responding to a request for PHI by a correctional institution or law enforcement official having lawful custody of an inmate or other individual, if the facility or official represents that the PHI is needed for:**
 - providing health care to the individual;
 - the health and safety of the individual, other inmates, officers, employees and others present at the correctional institution...²¹⁰

208. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Collaboration between police departments and sheriffs' offices." May 18, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay18>

209. Chief Thomas Weitzel. "Historic Pact Between Neighboring Agencies Offers Aid During Global Pandemic." Collaborative Reform Initiative, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0938-pub.pdf>

210. U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights. "COVID-19 and HIPAA: Disclosures to law enforcement, paramedics, other first responders and public health authorities." <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/covid-19-hipaa-and-first-responders-508.pdf>

However, the practice of sharing this information varied by jurisdiction and raised privacy concerns in some states. Critics said that when people receive COVID-19 tests and are assured that their health information will remain private, but the information is later released to police, it could undermine trust and have a chilling effect on people's willingness to receive COVID testing.²¹¹

For police agencies, information on COVID-19 cases within their jurisdiction was seen as a needed component of keeping their officers and deputies safe. In Miami, the Police Department addressed the privacy issue by asking the public health department for locations where people had tested positive for the coronavirus, not the people's names. In that way, police responding to a location could see whether the location had large numbers of persons who had tested positive for the virus. But they wouldn't know the names of the people. "We don't want to shame anyone for being ill, but it's helpful to know the density of how many people are positive," Police Chief Jorge Colina said.²¹²

In Volusia County, FL, Sheriff Mike Chitwood expressed frustration in July 2020 when the Florida Department of Health stopped providing addresses of persons who had tested positive for COVID. The Sheriff's Office had been posting updates on social media about COVID hot spots in the county, so residents could be aware of higher-risk areas. The Department of Health quickly announced that it would resume providing the information.²¹³

Vaccine Distribution

Public health partnerships also proved beneficial as COVID-19 vaccines became available. Police agencies were able to rely upon their public health partners to communicate information about the vaccines, and in some cases help administer the vaccine at police facilities.

- The **St. Mary's County, MD Sheriff's Office** hired a nurse at the start of the pandemic who was able to provide educational materials to the agency on the vaccine and was seen as a trusted source of information. The agency's nurse and other health department personnel also administered the vaccine to members of the sheriff's office.²¹⁴
- The **Cambridge, MA Police Department** also relied upon its public health partners to distribute the COVID vaccine to its personnel. The department collaborated with the fire department, the public health department, and EMS, which provided information about the vaccine, how to distribute it, and how to achieve high vaccination rates. In a relatively short period of time, the department was able to vaccinate 80% of its personnel.²¹⁵

211. Associated Press. "COVID-19 data sharing with law enforcement sparks concern." May 19, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/nv-state-wire-nd-state-wire-co-state-wire-nh-state-wire-public-health-ab4cbfb5575671c5630c2442bc3ca75e>

212. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Protecting elderly persons, and Miami PD heat maps." April 9, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril9>

213. ClickOrlando.com. "Health officials reverse decision after Volusia Sheriff expresses frustration in COVID-19 data sharing." July 9, 2020. <https://www.clickorlando.com/news/local/2020/07/09/health-officials-reverse-decision-after-volusia-sheriff-expresses-frustration-in-covid-19-data-sharing/>

214. PERF Daily COVID-19 Report, "Vaccine distribution to agency personnel." December 29, 2020. <https://www.policeforum.org/coviddec29>

215. PERF Virtual Town Hall. "Answering Your Questions about COVID-19 Vaccines." <https://www.policeforum.org/covid18feb21>

Conclusion

FOR MOST PEOPLE LIVING IN THE YEAR 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the biggest national crisis they have seen. The 9/11 attacks are often seen as a yardstick for comparing the sheer awfulness of catastrophes, but between March 2020 and December 2021, the pandemic on average killed more than 1,230 people per day, just in the United States. ***For the United States, in terms of casualties, the pandemic has been like another 9/11 attack occurring every few days, for almost two years.***

Around the world, the pandemic has challenged the very nature of policing. It has tested the ability of police officers and police leaders to be problem-solvers. To risk their lives. To be creative. To lead. To communicate. And to find ways to be resilient.

COVID-19 also has tested the police profession's stamina. In the very early days, police chiefs often told PERF that it was difficult to plan certain changes in operations, because they didn't know whether the changes would continue for a few weeks, or a few months, or God forbid, a year. No one wanted to contemplate the possibility of COVID lasting multiple years. But that is where we are at this writing.

And as the police executives and their officers scrambled to create new protocols for how they would perform every part of their jobs to account for COVID-19, they didn't know they would face additional challenges in 2020. The killing of George Floyd, and the hundreds of demonstrations and riots that followed. And the violent crime wave that emerged in the fall.

Police as COVID-19 Humanitarians

In many ways, the policing profession not only rose to the challenge of the pandemic, it found ways of going beyond the basics. Police demonstrated compassion and provided real help to those who were being hurt the hardest by COVID-19:

- Police got out their lists of addresses of elderly people living alone, and checked on them to see if they needed help getting groceries or prescriptions.
- Police realized that people experiencing homelessness were especially vulnerable, because they considered homeless shelters too risky for COVID. So police made it their business to reach out to people in homeless camps and provide them with masks and other assistance.
- Police immediately realized that victims of domestic violence would become more vulnerable due to COVID, and worked to make themselves more available to those who needed help.
- And, even with the risk of exposure to a highly contagious and deadly virus, police officers and sheriffs' deputies continued to respond to calls for service, investigate crimes, and work with other agencies and residents to help keep communities safe.

Responses Have Changed As the Pandemic Drags On

The pandemic continued so long that some of the early responses were quickly overtaken by events. In the early months, some police departments created “heat maps,” depicting the locations in their cities with high concentrations of people who had tested positive for COVID. It didn’t take long for the heat maps to show that almost all locations had large numbers of infections.

In other cases, people’s views have changed about actions that were taken to reduce the spread of COVID. In the spring of 2020, some police chiefs and sheriffs were working to send fewer low-level offenders to jail, or to release jail inmates early, in order to provide some “breathing space” at crowded jails and allow for social distancing. Unfortunately, inmates who were released into the pandemic were not always given the range of social services they normally would receive, to help them find employment and avoid returning to criminal activity. And in many jurisdictions, courts had to essentially shut down, because it was impossible to convene juries during the pandemic, and defendants saw little reason to plead guilty to a crime if there was no threat of a trial occurring.

So today, a number of police chiefs are saying that the sharp increases in crime in 2020-21 are due in part to a lack of sanctions for offenders.

Another issue that is evolving is the question of vaccine mandates. When the COVID vaccines first became available in December 2020, PERF surveyed its members and found that very few police chiefs were considering imposing any requirement that officers receive a vaccination. They believed that most of their personnel would want to be vaccinated, and they could work to provide information to those who were hesitant.

But by the summer of 2021, as another major national wave of infections and deaths occurred and vaccination rates stagnated, police chiefs increasingly supported vaccination mandates imposed by their mayors or governors. In some cases, chiefs required vaccinations on their own authority.

In some ways, the pandemic may bring permanent changes to policing, just as it is doing in other professions. To reduce COVID infections, some agencies were able to allow professional staff members, detectives, and certain other employees to work from home. In departments where that occurred without problems, that may continue after COVID. And the use of online and telephone reporting systems for many property offenses is likely to continue, as is the use of technology to engage more residents in community meetings, surveys, and other types of outreach.

But policing is mostly an in-person occupation with a great deal of public contact, and that will not change.

“As We Go to Print...”

Hopefully, in coming months, the pandemic will evolve into a lower-level “endemic” status or disappear almost entirely, and police will continue to adjust to changes. As courts resume trials, police will step up their work with prosecutors. Hopefully, as vaccination rates increase, police will resume a wide range of in-person community activities. And law enforcement agencies will expand wellness programming to help their officers and professional staff members manage the high levels of stress in policing, especially during an extended period of crisis.

Despite all of the changes occurring simultaneously over the past two years, the story of policing during the pandemic in many ways is a story of overcoming obstacles. There have been no news stories about the collapse of police agencies due to the pandemic. Police managed to avoid mass outbreaks of COVID infections and sharp reductions in staffing. Critical services such as 9-1-1 response were maintained.

This was not a result of good luck, but rather of smart planning and fast action to prevent the spread of the virus through police departments. Time and time again, police chiefs and sheriffs have been creative and nimble in how they have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenge for police and sheriffs’ departments

going forward is to maintain their readiness and improve their skills in handling this type of public health crisis.

In 2007, PERF produced a report about police planning for a pandemic, and 13 years later, it happened. A new Duke University study suggests that there's about a 2% chance every year of a pandemic

similar to COVID-19 occurring, so it's fairly likely that young people today may experience another pandemic as bad as COVID.²¹⁶ If that occurs, this publication may serve as a blueprint showing how America's police agencies stepped up, and the continuing challenges they faced.

216. EurekaAlert! "Statistics say large pandemics are more likely than we thought." August 23, 2021. <https://www.eurekaalert.org/news-releases/926011>

About the Police Executive Research Forum

THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM (PERF) is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force; developing community policing and problem-oriented policing; using technologies to deliver police services to the community; and developing and assessing crime reduction strategies.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership; public debate of police and criminal justice issues; and research and policy development.

The nature of PERF's work can be seen in the reports PERF has published over the years. Most of these reports are available without charge online at <http://www.policeforum.org/free-online-documents>. All of the titles in the *Critical Issues in Policing* series can be found on the back cover of this report and on the PERF website at <https://www.policeforum.org/critical-issues-series>.

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts

management studies of individual law enforcement agencies; educates hundreds of police officials each year in the Senior Management Institute for Police, a three-week executive development program; and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, who share information and open their agencies to research and study. PERF members also include academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

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To learn more about PERF, visit www.policeforum.org.



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As the charitable and philanthropic arm of Motorola Solutions, the Motorola Solutions Foundation partners with organizations around the globe to create safer cities and equitable, thriving communities. We focus on giving back through strategic grants, employee volunteerism and other community investment initiatives. Our strategic grants program

supports organizations that offer first responder programming and technology and engineering education, and align to our values of accountability, innovation, impact, diversity and inclusion. The Foundation is one of the many ways in which the company lives out its purpose of helping people be their best in the moments that matter.

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