

Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC)

# COVID-19 Law Enforcement Impact and Response



**COPS**  
Community Oriented Policing Services  
U.S. Department of Justice

 **IACP**  
International Association of  
Chiefs of Police



Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC)

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# Letter from the Director of the COPS Office and the Executive Director of the IACP

Colleagues:

While law enforcement has always risen to meet the needs of communities, the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the boundaries on policing and the world in general. In March 2020, recognizing the dire need for rapid guidance and resources for the field, and for capturing the challenges of pandemic response and the promising practices and lessons to be learned from it, the COPS Office turned to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and our premier technical assistance center, the Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) to mobilize to meet those needs. CRI-TAC, led by the IACP and eight leading law enforcement stakeholder associations—the Fraternal Order of Police; FBI National Academy Associates, Inc.; International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators; International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training; National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives; National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives; National Sheriffs' Association (NSA); and National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA)—launched COVID-19 National Response activities.

This report is the result of an unprecedented effort by the COPS Office and CRI-TAC to actively document the impact of the virus on local law enforcement, including crime, officer safety, officer stress, equipment needs, and other public safety issues. The CRI-TAC team engaged in numerous forums and discussions with the field on their experiences, challenges, and promising practices. The team conducted hundreds of hours of research, from studying open-source data to national conversations and presentations, to obtain the data necessary to develop and actively maintain a COVID-19 National Impact Surveillance Tracker. This Tracker not only painted a picture of the field's challenges and emerging adaptations but also allowed CRI-TAC to identify and fill resource gaps by quickly developing guidance documents, hosting webinars, and providing space for information sharing.

We are proud to provide this sentinel report, *Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center: COVID-19 Law Enforcement Impact and Response*, to the field. This report highlights the challenges, adaptations, and promising practices that evolved in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our hope is that this report can assist law enforcement agencies as they move forward while policing during COVID-19, and simultaneously offer agencies considerations for creative, innovative adaptations for policing in general. More importantly, we believe this report will provide valuable information and insights to aid law enforcement in planning and preparing for future large-scale challenges which disrupt operational norms in policing.

We want to thank the CRI-TAC partners and team members for their input and support for these efforts. We also want to thank the staff that went above and beyond to operationalize the vision for this project and to develop such an impactful report.

Finally, we want to acknowledge that there has been tremendous loss throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and in particular among members of law enforcement. The trauma from COVID-19 will have lasting impacts and we recognize there is a human factor behind every data point, theme, and adaptation. We continue to remind ourselves of that as we work in this space. We hope that the promising practices and adaptations provided through this work will help to move us forward.

We thank all that serve our communities and keep us safe.

Sincerely,



Hugh T. Clements, Jr.

Director

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services



Vincent Talucci

Executive Director

International Association of Chiefs of Police



# Acknowledgments

This publication draws on inputs from projects, work, and experts from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP); the partner organizations of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC); and a variety of peer partnerships and networks.

A sincere thank you to the staff of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) National Academy Associates Inc., Fraternal Order of Police, International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training, National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, National Policing Institute, National Sheriffs' Association, and National Tactical Officers Association—partners in this endeavor who contributed to the vast body of CRI-TAC COVID-19 resources, from customized tools to webinars to this impact report. Diverse participants of these various organizational meetings, online communities, electronic conversations, and webinars lent their insights, perspectives, and experiences to the themes presented within this report. We want to thank each participant for their contributions and feedback.

COPS Office staff have provided unwavering support during unprecedented times in creating opportunity, championing innovation, and transforming the CRI-TAC COVID-19 project efforts from an idea into a reality. Lastly, a special thanks to the IACP CRI-TAC COVID-19 impact team for their focused dedication and hard work in gathering, supporting, and contributing to the collection of information and written material that has culminated in this report.

We also want to acknowledge the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on law enforcement and the communities they serve and the lives of officers who died in the line of duty from COVID-19. We thank those who shared their experiences and lessons learned through our various impact surveillance activities.



# Executive Summary

The COVID-19 virus, detected and identified in December of 2019, became a global pandemic by March of 2020.\* The resulting impacts of this public health emergency drastically altered the manner in which society operated and life was approached. Businesses and schools closed; people stayed home; constraints were placed on human interactions; and patterns of traffic, commerce, interpersonal interactions, crime, and other aspects of human behavior changed. Yet, law enforcement remained essential to public safety throughout the pandemic. Although many jobs in other industries mandated their employees work remotely from home, the functions of law enforcement required in-person work and community interaction. Law enforcement agencies had to maintain operational levels of service to the community but, at the same time, had a duty to keep their officers, civilian employees, agency family members, and the communities they served safe.

To fully understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on law enforcement, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) began monitoring the effects of the pandemic on law enforcement and law enforcement's response and adaptations. The CRI-TAC team monitored these impacts from March 2020 through the end of 2020. Challenges and adaptations brought about by the pandemic were sourced from public reports, professional meetings, personal correspondence, and peer forums and synthesized. Although each law enforcement agency is unique, five common impact themes emerged:

- **Theme 1. Administration and Operations.** As officers fell ill or were exposed to the virus and forced to quarantine, police agencies faced significant staff shortages. At the same time, recruitment and hiring efforts were paused or suspended in most agencies. Existing procedures and protocols had to be adjusted to minimize interpersonal interaction. Implementing these changes posed difficulties exacerbated by limited personnel resources. Agencies adapted by reallocating resources, implementing remote operations where possible, reimagining training opportunities, reducing enforcement activities if appropriate, collaborating with other organizations, and maintaining consistent communication channels.

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\* WHO (World Health Organization), "Listings of WHO's Response to COVID-19," last modified January 29, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-06-2020-covidtimeline>.

- **Theme 2. Community Impact.** With fewer people in public, fewer officers on the streets, and limitations to in-person engagement opportunities, noticeable shifts occurred in police-community engagement. As a result of the state of fear and uncertainty, economic impacts, and home confinement, increases were noted in service calls related to substance abuse and issues related to mental health. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic had disproportionate effects on already-marginalized communities, potentially exacerbating existing disadvantages. Police agencies adapted to these challenges by increasing their virtual presence with the community and adding more targeted in-person outreach to community members in need.
- **Theme 3. Crime Trends.** Crime trends varied across the pandemic by jurisdiction, by crime type, and over time as the pandemic evolved. Some crimes decreased as people remained indoors and traveled less. Other crimes, such as hate crimes, cybercrime, and commercial burglaries, increased. In other types of crime, the pattern was unclear. For example, reports of child abuse in some areas decreased, but this decrease raised additional concerns that abuse was unreported as children no longer had access to teachers and other caregivers outside the home. Police agencies adjusted their operations to encourage reporting in new ways and to allocate resources based on crimes of the greatest prevalence or severity.
- **Theme 4. Enforcement.** The pandemic created uncharted territory, and federal, state, and local public health guidance often changed rapidly, creating questions and confusion. As public health orders were issued to stay at home, close businesses, limit large gatherings, or wear masks covering the mouth and nose, uncertainty arose as to the role of law enforcement in enforcing these orders. Police responded by encouraging voluntary compliance whenever possible, taking a proactive approach to educate the community on public health orders and enforcement, and distributing hygiene supplies and protective equipment to those without.
- **Theme 5. Officer Safety and Wellness.** Many of the public's safety and wellness fears and concerns were also prevalent among law enforcement. Concerns were exacerbated by the nature of police work, extended hours and staffing shortages, and the interpersonal interaction inherent to the job. Police agencies responded to these challenges by adjusting policies and protocols to enhance physical safety and mitigate concerns, collaborating with other organizations to provide needed products and services, expanding coverage of death benefits to families of officers who died of COVID-19, and increasing attention to mental health support services and resources.

As agencies faced continual constraints on their operations, creative adaptations helped them remain nimble, resilient, and focused on protecting community safety. Successful strategies for response to the pandemic were dependent on the following components, which this report highlights in lessons learned:

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Technology
- Policy and Procedures
- Education and Advocacy
- Innovation

This report is the synthesis of information collected by CRI-TAC on law enforcement impacts and response to the pandemic. It is organized around the five impact themes, which are further segmented into challenges encountered and examples of adaptation to these challenges. Agency innovations and COVID-19 resources are spotlighted throughout the report. An appendix provides insights into law enforcement response to COVID-19 from around the world, highlighting similarities and differences of those experiences to those of U.S.-based law enforcement.



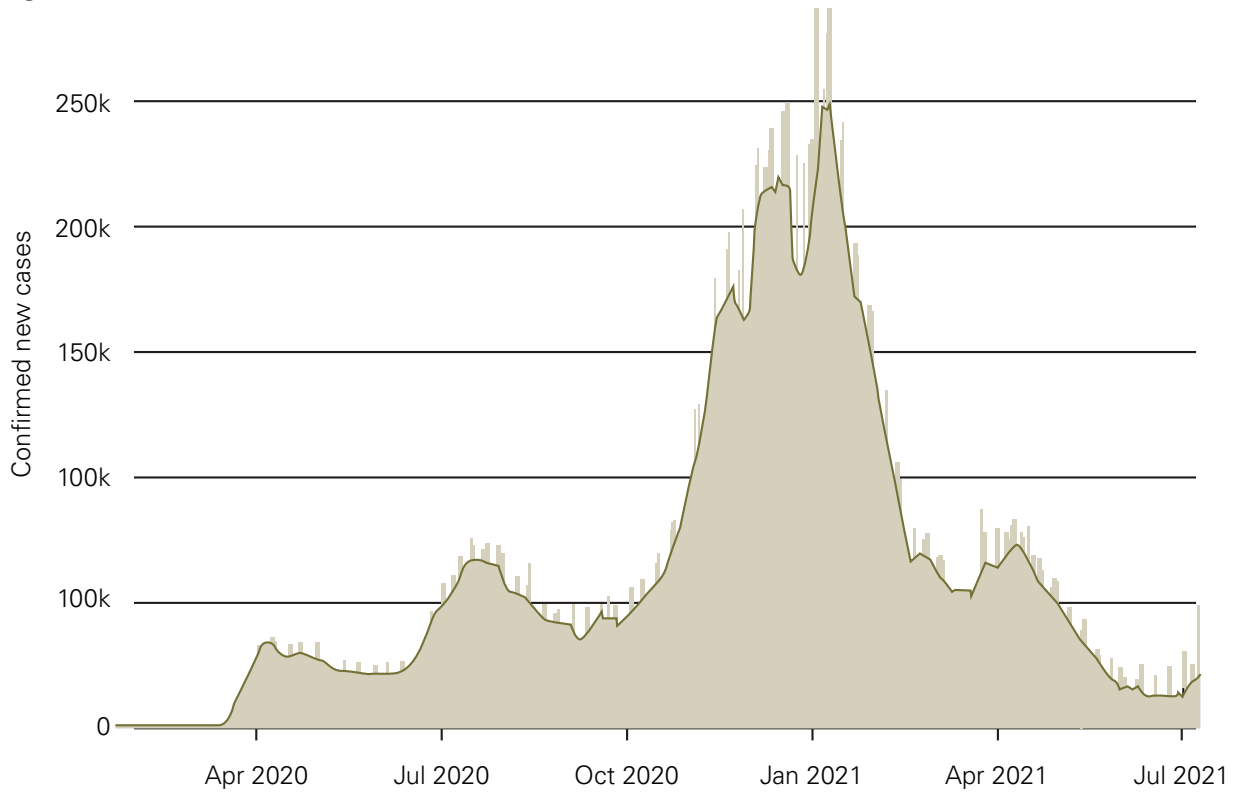
# Introduction and Project Background

## The COVID-19 pandemic

An unknown virus was detected in December 2019 when a group of individuals in China began showing pneumonia-like symptoms. The virus was identified as a coronavirus and named SARS-CoV-2 with the resulting disease termed *coronavirus disease 2019*, or COVID-19. By the end of January 2020, the virus had spread across the globe to the United States, and the World Health Organization (WHO) had begun discussions on whether the virus constituted an international public health emergency. By March 2020, it had been designated a pandemic.<sup>1</sup> By mid-March, parts of the United States had begun issuing guidance—and in some cases mandates—to stay home for anything other than essential outings.<sup>2</sup> Businesses sent their employees home to work remotely. Schools migrated their curricula to online classes. Restaurants and movie theaters closed. Graduation ceremonies were canceled. Travel was halted.

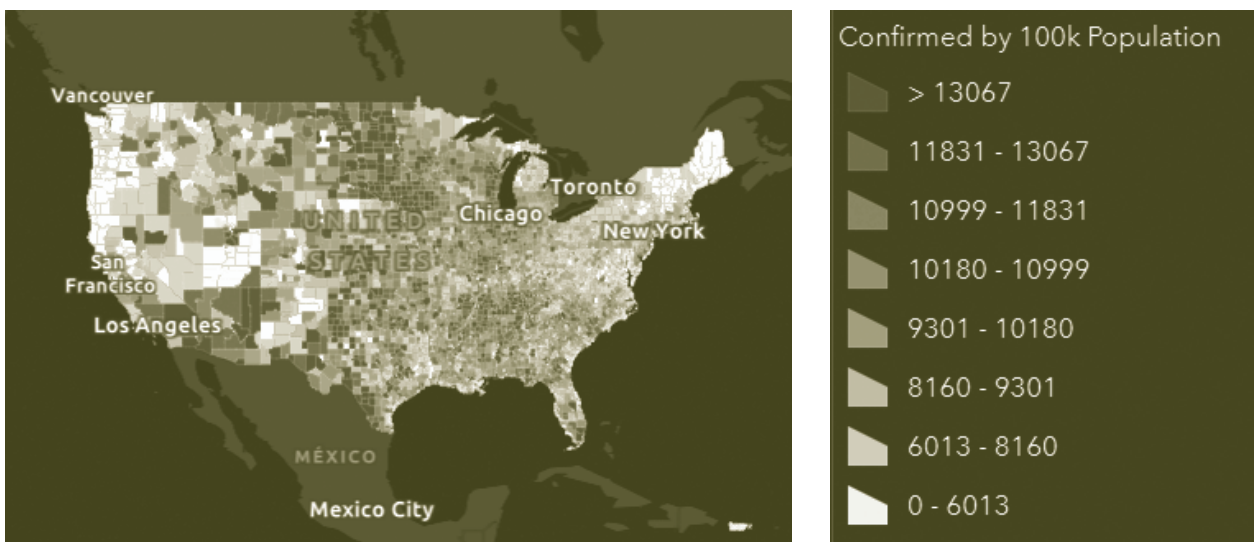
Despite these precautions, confirmed cases of COVID-19 infections continued to rise across the United States and did not begin to subside until 2021 (figure 1 on page 6). Data compiled by Johns Hopkins University illustrates the exponential growth of COVID-19 cases and deaths from the onset of the pandemic through July 2021. By April 2020, there had been more than 45,000 COVID-19 deaths in the United States. By June, the number was more than 100,000. The numbers increased exponentially in the fall and winter of 2020, and by the new year there had been more than 375,000 COVID-19 deaths in the United States. Prior to the rise of the delta variant in the summer of 2021, U.S. cases had declined to their lowest levels since the emergence of the pandemic. At that point there had been more than 33 million total confirmed COVID-19 cases and more than 607,000 deaths in the United States (figure 2 on page 6).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1. New cases of COVID-19 in the United States**



Source: "Maps & Trends: New COVID-19 Cases Worldwide," Johns Hopkins University, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/new-cases>.

**Figure 2. Cases of COVID-19 in the Continental U.S. as of July 12, 2021**



Source: "COVID-19 United States Cases by County," Johns Hopkins University, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/us-map>.



## Policing during the COVID-19 pandemic: About this report

COVID-19 affected organizations of all kinds in some way, but especially affected law enforcement, which had to adapt previously established practices to the dynamic and uncharted climate of the pandemic. In order to provide information and assistance to the field, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) required a broader understanding of the distinct impacts of the pandemic on police agencies. Such an overview is a necessary first step toward extracting valuable lessons learned, identifying innovative solutions in crime response and meeting community needs, and documenting overall public safety trends to provide a unique national perspective on law enforcement operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

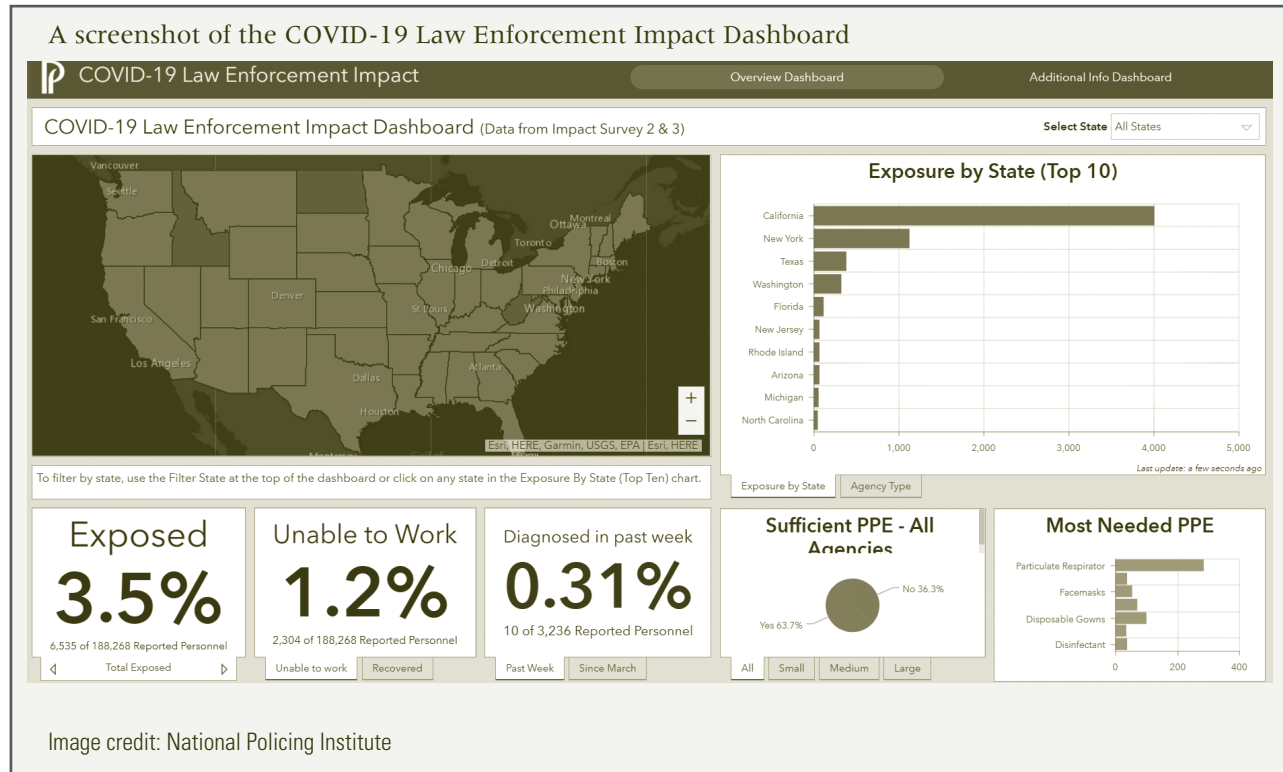
To accomplish these goals, the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) quickly mobilized to meet the needs of law enforcement agencies as they adapted to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. CRI-TAC identified gaps in resources for the field and created products to fill them, many of which are woven throughout this report. CRI-TAC partnerships were integral to the information sharing, resource development, data collection, and analysis that culminated in this report.

### **The National Policing Institute's COVID-19 Law Enforcement Impact Dashboard**

In September 2020, the COPS Office and IACP announced a partnership through CRI-TAC with the National Policing Institute (NPI), then the National Police Foundation, to develop and share COVID-19 resources with the law enforcement community. This included support for collecting data through the NPI COVID-19 Law Enforcement Impact Dashboard and the release of a COVID-19 line of duty death analysis. The NPI developed and launched the *Real-Time COVID-19 Law Enforcement Impact Situational Awareness Dashboard* at <https://www.policefoundation.org/covid-19/#Dashboard>. This tool offered agencies the ability to monitor and assess the impacts of COVID-19 on officer exposure, diagnoses, workforce impacts, and personal protective equipment (PPE) needs and projections as information was reported in real time.

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Source : IACP (International Association of Chiefs of Police), "CRI-TAC COVID-19 Partnership with National Police Foundation and Release of LODD Analysis," press release, September 11, 2020, <https://www.theiacp.org/news/blog-post/cri-tac-covid-19-partnership-with-national-police-foundation-and-release-of-lodd>; National Policing Institute, "Coronavirus (COVID-19): Resources for Law Enforcement," accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.policefoundation.org/covid-19/#Dashboard>.

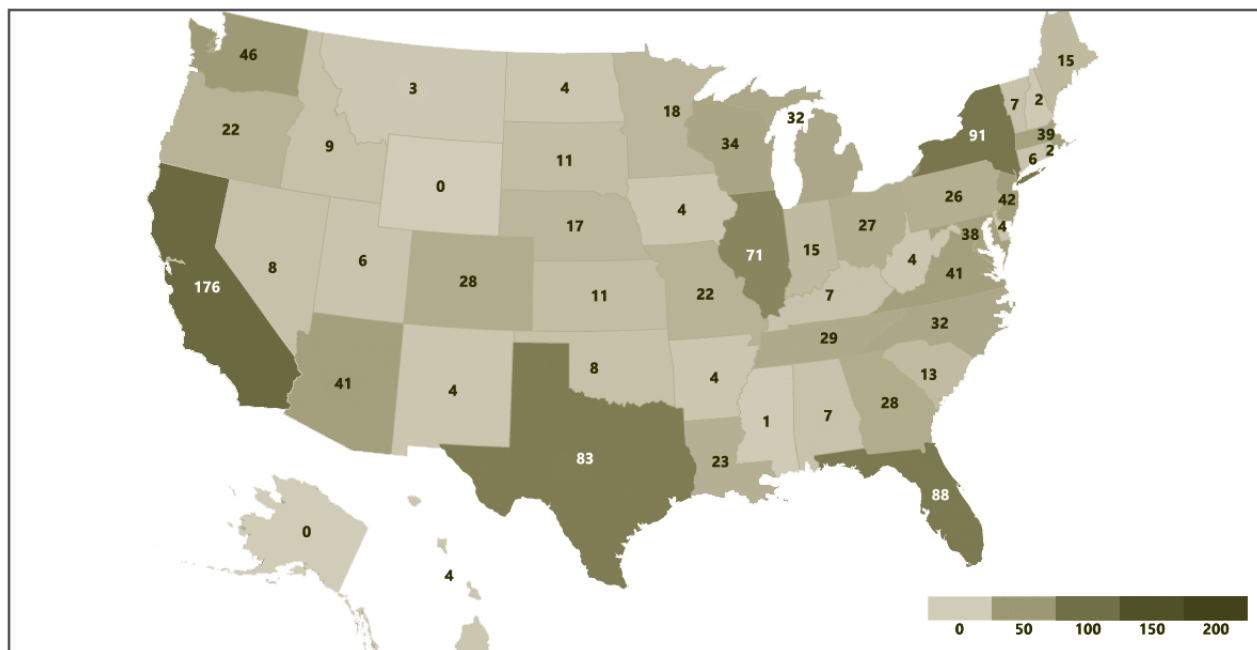


To create this report, the CRI-TAC team collected information from sources across the nation on the impact of COVID-19 on law enforcement, including in the areas of crime, officer safety, officer wellness, equipment needs, and other important public safety topics. This report reflects a snapshot in time, based on information collected primarily from March through December 2020, and as such has limitations. Information was collected from sources including news articles, reports, webinars, workshops, meetings, initial studies and data trends, and conversations; despite this variety of sources, however, it should not be generalized as applicable to the experiences of all, or even most, law enforcement. Information presented is based on the perspectives of the agencies or individuals sharing their experiences and may be subject to the interpretation of the writer or the reader. Furthermore, because of the constant and rapid shifts in conditions for law enforcement, information presented may have had a limited period of accuracy or appropriate context. In some circumstances during the creation of this report, the writers accessed further information to provide up-to-date details or previously unavailable data.

Throughout the information-gathering process, the content gathered and our knowledge of the global impacts for law enforcement naturally intersected with CRI-TAC efforts and provided an opportunity to capture details and trends on experiences happening around the world simultaneously. The appendix [COVID-19 Response Around the World beginning on page 103](#) provides a view across the globe. The agencies represented domestically in this collection are

counted by state in figure 3. Throughout 2021 and into the future, additional information and the development of evidence-based data will continue to shape our understanding both of the coronavirus and of the short- and long-term impacts of the pandemic on policing.

**Figure 3. Data sources by state**



After review and synthesis of the information collected, the writers have structured this report around the following impact themes:

- **Administration and Operations.** Law enforcement administration and operations faced challenges including COVID-19's impact on staffing and recruitment, adapting procedures to balance continuity of operations with officer safety, effects on investigations and engagement with crime victims, and identifying health and safety solutions for corrections settings.
- **Community Impact.** Throughout the evolution of the coronavirus pandemic, police agencies had the difficult task of adapting their own practices and strategies while enforcing changing public health orders; at times, this task was further complicated by overall confusion and miscommunication regarding local public health orders and guidelines. Furthermore, vulnerable segments of the population may have been affected by COVID-19 more than others because of a lack of accessible resources. Through education and outreach, many agencies sought nontraditional and innovative means for establishing relationships, connecting to community, and maintaining public safety.

- **Crime Trends.** Crime trends varied across the pandemic and by jurisdiction and crime type. Some jurisdictions indicated an overall drop in crime, while others reported an increase in crime of various types. Law enforcement, criminal justice experts, and victim advocates noted crime trends—increases, decreases, and other changes—related to domestic violence, child abuse, human trafficking, property crimes, hate and extremism, cybercrime, fraud, speeding, and violent crime including homicide. At the beginning of the pandemic, changes in crime trends were speculative and measured anecdotally. As the pandemic progressed over time, some quantitative data became available.
- **Enforcement.** Officers and deputies were expected to maintain an effective balance between enforcing the law and limiting contact through social distancing measures to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for themselves and community. Striking an effective balance of duties and safety was further complicated by unclear expectations as to the role of police in enforcing public health orders.
- **Officer Safety and Wellness.** Multiple factors contributed to overall concerns surrounding health and wellness for law enforcement and their families throughout COVID-19. These included a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), the need to prioritize public safety personnel for COVID-19 testing, steps to minimize risk of exposure for staff and their families, shift changes and reduction in force, and overall increased and prolonged stress and anxiety.

The challenges and adaptations police agencies faced within each of these themes are detailed in the sections that follow.

## Section Endnotes—Introduction

1. WHO (World Health Organization), “Listings of WHO’s Response to COVID-19,” last modified January 29, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-06-2020-covidtimeline>; WHO, “Timeline: WHO’s COVID-19 Response,” accessed November 18, 2021, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline>; Johns Hopkins University of Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, “Data Visualizations: Animated Maps,” accessed November 18, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/animated-world-map>.
2. A. Moreland, C. Herlihy, M.A. Tynan, et al., “Timing of State and Territorial COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Orders and Changes in Population Movement — United States, March 1–May 31, 2020,” *Morbidity and Mortal Weekly Report* 69 (2020), 1198–1203, [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6935a2.htm?s\\_cid=mm6935a2\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6935a2.htm?s_cid=mm6935a2_w).
3. Johns Hopkins University of Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, “COVID-19 United States Cases by County,” accessed November 18, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/us-map>.

# Theme 1. Administration and Operations

## Challenges

### Staffing and recruitment

As law enforcement personnel across the United States fell ill or were exposed to COVID-19, they had to self-quarantine or isolate to reduce further spread of the virus. This severely reduced available personnel resources impacting all aspects of public safety operations.

In New Jersey, although some regions were more heavily impacted by the virus than others, agencies across the state felt a strain on personnel resources.<sup>1</sup> The New Jersey State Police established mandatory quarantine protocols requiring not only individuals exposed to the COVID-19 virus to quarantine but also all other members of their squad. These protocols led to personnel reductions.<sup>2</sup>

The Lone Star (Texas) Police Department had to rely on neighboring agencies, many of which were also short-staffed, when all four members of the department fell ill.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, half of the West (Texas) Police Department's staff was unable to work when they were forced into isolation. Larger agencies in Texas felt the impact too. The Houston Police Department, the Harris County Sheriff's Office, the Austin Police Department, the San Antonio Police Department,<sup>4</sup> and the Texas Department of Public Safety<sup>5</sup> all had significant numbers of staff members contract COVID-19, reducing those departments' operational capacity.

Like many other agencies, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) experienced such significant staffing shortages as officers grew ill or were exposed and forced to quarantine that by April 2020, nearly 20 percent of the department's officers were out sick.<sup>6</sup> Further, officers who were at elevated risk of contracting the virus were working from home in a limited capacity. At the same time, an increase in some types of calls further strained department resources. With approximately 150 deaths reported in the city daily, officers were tasked with responding and securing the scenes in these situations until the medical examiner could arrive, which often took hours.<sup>7</sup> By September 2020, 46 of the department's employees had died of COVID-related causes.<sup>8</sup> By October 2020, more than 2,000 had requested retirement as a result of pandemic stress and burnout—the highest yearly retirement numbers since 2010.<sup>9</sup>

Some agencies experienced budget cuts and reductions in revenue, which further impacted staffing and operations, resulting in personnel layoffs. In other agencies, such as the Montgomery County (Alabama) Sheriff's Office, the workload for staff who remained healthy and employed increased to offset the reduction in resources.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, by July 2020 the Covington County (Alabama) Sheriff's Office had spent nearly seven times what it had budgeted annually for overtime work.<sup>11</sup>

With already limited resources, many agencies halted recruitment and academy training, leading to further shortfalls in staffing to adequately support operational needs. Without active recruitment and academy training efforts, many agencies experienced a further increase in unfilled positions. Some paused their academy or classroom training to avoid spreading the virus through groups of people in confined spaces, including the Phoenix Police Department,<sup>12</sup> the Massachusetts State Police Academy,<sup>13</sup> the Portland (Oregon) Police Bureau,<sup>14</sup> and the Kansas Highway Patrol. Recertifications also became a concern, as officers struggled to find open shooting ranges to maintain their qualifications, putting their certifications at risk.<sup>15</sup> When agencies did move forward with training, they faced challenges mitigating exposures. For example, the Washington (D.C.) Metropolitan Police Department discovered that a number of its positive COVID-19 cases were traced back to cadets.<sup>16</sup>

On May 26, 2020, a questionnaire was disseminated to participants in the Police Executive Research Forum's (PERF) 2019 police workforce project to determine the impact of COVID-19 on recruitment and hiring practices. More than 140 respondents completed the questionnaire. Respondents communicated major setbacks in hiring due to the suspension of in-person recruitment and hiring events and budgetary limitations caused by COVID-19. Results reflected that more than 75 percent of responding agencies had changed recruitment and hiring practices, with 22 percent of responding agencies reporting a decrease in the number of applicants received, 19 percent reporting an increase, and 30 percent indicating the number of applicants has remained the same since the onset of COVID-19.<sup>17</sup> Changes to practices included moving components of the process to a virtual format, moving certain activities outdoors, and arranging for smaller testing sessions. Some agencies adopted processes more common in private industry, such as continuous recruitment and "headhunting," while others froze hiring or left positions vacant.<sup>18</sup>

Some parts of the country also experienced an increase in crime (see [Theme 3. Crime Trends, beginning on page 55](#)). For example, the understaffed Detroit Police Department faced an increase in violent crime during the pandemic, making the effects of its resource shortage even more detrimental.<sup>19</sup>

## Continuity of operations

To reduce the risk of exposure from interactions between law enforcement and the community, agencies adjusted operational procedures to increase physical distance and limit unnecessary physical interaction with community members and with one another while maintaining effective continuity of operations. Numerous agencies implemented updated shift protocols, including those in New Orleans, Louisiana,<sup>20</sup> and Odessa, Texas,<sup>21</sup> where detectives worked staggered shifts to avoid cross-contamination with other units.

The interpersonal contact required during activities like custodial arrests and traffic stops put officers at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19.<sup>22</sup> Although wearing PPE may have been an option and was sometimes necessary, it could also impair an officer's performance. Nitrile gloves could make it harder for an officer to draw their weapon, and glasses often fogged while wearing a mask, especially during moments of increased respiration, impairing an officer's visibility.<sup>23</sup>

To reduce physical interactions with other persons, some minor crimes were not enforced as heavily as they had been prior to the pandemic, and officers struggled with the balance between enforcing the law and limiting contact and exposure.

In the police departments of Chicago and Buffalo Grove, Illinois, officers were encouraged to enforce minor crimes using citations or misdemeanor summonses rather than physical arrest.<sup>24</sup> The Hennepin County (Minnesota) Sheriff's Office scaled back its traffic enforcement efforts.<sup>25</sup> The Miami-Dade Police Department similarly reprioritized parking violations and certain traffic infractions as less important than they had been.<sup>26</sup> This drop in enforcement activity likely resulted from a combination of officer discretion or intent and the fact that fewer people were out and about on the roads or in public.<sup>27</sup>

The New Orleans Police Department continued to make arrests. Physical arrests increased the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for both officers and community members, and bringing COVID-19 into jails further exposed both corrections personnel and other detainees to the virus.<sup>28</sup> When the virus spread in jails—as it did in Rikers Island in New York—it was nearly impossible to contain.<sup>29</sup> New Orleans did make changes to its arrest protocols following a request from the Louisiana Supreme Court.<sup>30</sup>

Inconsistency in enforcement guidance led to inconsistent practices and confusion. Adding to this confusion, police were sometimes called upon to enforce public health orders. In a survey of more than 3,000 officers, 42 percent reported that they would take enforcement action on public health orders only after significant warnings, 25 percent reported that their agency mostly ignored public health orders, and 20 percent reported no consistency in enforcement.<sup>31</sup> In New Jersey, when the

governor put limits on social gatherings, police from multiple agencies were called upon to disrupt a party of about 300 people.<sup>32</sup> These inconsistencies added to community tensions and brought into question the scope of enforcement by agencies.

Investigations and interviews with victims and witnesses also posed challenges. Officers needed to conduct interviews in secure locations but also to limit the number of people entering their buildings. In some cases, investigations were put on hold as police resources were reallocated to other efforts. When investigations did continue, interviews occurred virtually or in person but at a distance without contact. The importance of discussing events of a sensitive nature, such as domestic or sexual violence, in a private, secure location had to be balanced against the limitations of and compliance with guidance on physical distancing and other precautionary measures.<sup>33</sup> The Houston Police Department asked anyone entering its building to wear a mask, but this created challenges during interviews and interrogations, as it is more difficult to build trust and rapport when masks block facial expressions.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the Cass County (Nebraska) Sheriff's Office found it difficult for officers to evaluate the demeanor of a victim or suspect wearing a mask.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the error rate of facial recognition technology jumped significantly when the software tried to identify subjects wearing masks, according to a study by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.<sup>36</sup>

Although sexual assault exams are necessary to assist in the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases, the Nampa (Idaho) Police Department found that COVID-19 made these exams more difficult to conduct. Because of COVID-19 protocols, victim support could not be present in the hospital to offer crucial support and participate in exams as they had in the past, and detectives had less access to victims because they could not begin the investigation at the hospital.<sup>37</sup>

While investigations of all kinds often require work in the field or in a laboratory setting, it is difficult to maintain continuity of operations and productivity in these physical workspaces while adhering to physical distancing guidelines. Agencies across the country placed some investigations on hold as they found it necessary to shift resources and detail detectives to assist on patrol or cover for peers who were sick with COVID-19.

Other components of the criminal justice system, such as courts and corrections, also had to make changes, leading to further impacts on police operations. Police agencies had to adjust and adapt quickly to the new operational environment.<sup>38</sup> Court proceedings were delayed because they could not be held in person. The backlog in the local court system temporarily led the Lincoln (Nebraska) Police Department to suspend arrest warrants for nonviolent offenses.<sup>39</sup>



During hurricane season, the operational conditions created by the pandemic posed additional challenges in the southeast. In the past, the Wilmington (North Carolina) Police Department had allowed police and their families to seek shelter at the headquarters during a major storm, but during the pandemic, family members were not included in the department's contingency plan for storm preparations and shelter. The Galveston (Texas) Police Department also had to make difficult decisions in its hurricane preparations. While the department had designated essential and nonessential employees during the pandemic, the department's hurricane plans also designated essential and nonessential employees, and the distinctions were not necessarily the same. This discrepancy required the department to update its policies and protocols concerning essential staff.<sup>40</sup> Across the country, public officials grew concerned about the effects of severe weather—not only how to implement evacuation procedures if necessary but also the weather's impact on infrastructure and its potential to interfere with remote operations and increase the threat of secondary disasters.<sup>41</sup>

Once available, the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine presented logistical challenges. The United States Marshals Service led the security and transportation plans for vaccine distribution in conjunction with various levels of law enforcement. Police agencies were notified when vaccine distribution was expected in their jurisdiction so that they could monitor traffic routes accordingly.<sup>42</sup>

## **Financial impact**

Municipal budgets were negatively impacted by the economic conditions brought about by the pandemic. Government employees—sometimes including first responders—had to take pay cuts, while others were laid off or furloughed.<sup>43</sup> About half of police chiefs and sheriffs surveyed by PERF in July 2020 expected budget reductions in the upcoming fiscal year.<sup>44</sup> Some states, such as Wisconsin<sup>45</sup> and Arizona,<sup>46</sup> sought and received funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, but there was little direction in how that money was to be allocated and a myriad of state and local agencies that needed the assistance.

The NYPD made plans to reduce its incoming recruit class.<sup>47</sup> The Buffalo Grove (Illinois) Police Department experienced a 10 percent reduction in staff because of decreased tax revenue.<sup>48</sup> In New Orleans, 4,700 city employees were furloughed, while others saw their salaries reduced. The city administration further warned that additional budget cuts and reductions in personnel would be likely in the year to follow.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, some agencies, like the Cass County (Nebraska) Sheriff's Office, had to buy their own PPE, which added unplanned costs to their agency's forecasted budget.<sup>50</sup>

Detention centers also suffered from the financial impact, and sheriffs worried that the reduction in police and correctional resources might further increase the expectations placed upon them.<sup>51</sup> The budget for California sheriffs' agencies quickly changed from a surplus to a deficit.<sup>52</sup> As a result of pandemic-related sale tax revenue losses, Los Angeles County lost \$66.6 million of state funding in support of California's early release realignment, designed to reduce the jail population.<sup>53</sup> In the Clark County (Virginia) Detention Center, almost one-third of deputies were laid off in May 2020; fewer personnel resources were needed as police officers were making fewer arrests and offenders were being released (see [Correctional Institutions beginning on page 31](#)).<sup>54</sup>

First responders felt direct financial impacts of COVID-19 through changes to their work schedules as well as through the effects of COVID-19 illness or death striking them or their families. Many needed assistance with dependent care costs, housing, and other necessities. The NPI National First Responder COVID-19 grant program awarded grants for first responders in need of financial relief.<sup>55</sup>

Even volunteers felt the financial impact. The Washington County, Utah, search and rescue team is composed of volunteers. During the pandemic, indoor businesses closed, and more people ventured outside recreationally. This led to an increase in search and rescue calls and a greater reliance on the team of volunteers, who had to use their own money to purchase additional equipment.<sup>56</sup>

## Communications

During the pandemic, practices and protocols that had worked well in the past were forced to change. The conditions of the pandemic forced police agencies to rely more heavily on technology and virtual communication.<sup>57</sup> Previously scheduled meetings and conferences were canceled to avoid large gatherings of people.<sup>58</sup> In some cases, these changes impaired law enforcement leaders' ability to communicate with their sworn and professional staff and external parties.<sup>59</sup>

Some agencies that were not prepared to operate virtually had to implement new systems. This process took time and resources and presented a learning curve until users were familiar enough with the new systems to use them smoothly. Moving to virtual operations also posed security concerns and required close oversight to ensure sensitive information was appropriately restricted. The shift to the digital domain also relied heavily on public infrastructure and internet service providers, and remote connections were at increased risk of failure in the event of an emergency. In the past, if such a situation occurred, collaborating agencies would convene together physically in an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), but this solution was not available during the pandemic.<sup>60</sup>

## Adaptations

### Resource reallocation

Police agencies changed employee schedules to minimize employees' contact with one another and ability to spread COVID-19; to accommodate officers who needed to self-quarantine; and to allow for continuity of efficient operations. Agencies adjusted shift schedules, reassigned officers to function areas in need, conducted meetings virtually, and created standby "on call" work options.<sup>61</sup> These adjustments reduced the risk of exposure to COVID-19 while also facilitating continuity and collaboration.<sup>62</sup> In the Denver Police Department, for example, leaders moved more staff to night shifts and enhanced patrol in commercial areas, where burglary had become an increased concern.<sup>63</sup>

Many agencies divided their personnel into two or more separate groups that would not have physical contact. This way, if any employee were to contract COVID-19, its spread would be limited to that employee's group, and the virus would be unlikely to spread through the entire workforce. The New Jersey State Police divided each of its existing squads in half, with half working actively in the field and the other half working from home.<sup>64</sup> The Appleton (Wisconsin) Police Department divided its staff into four separate teams, each working for seven days followed by a team quarantine of 14 days, which they found both minimized COVID-19 cases and was helpful for officers' physical and mental health.<sup>65</sup> The Norwood (Massachusetts) Police Department and the Tempe (Arizona) Police Department<sup>66</sup> similarly divided their senior leadership into two groups functioning separately. The Aurora (Illinois) Police Department<sup>67</sup> and various departments in Wisconsin<sup>68</sup> also used adjusted staff schedules to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Other agencies reallocated personnel resources across function areas. To account for a shortage in available patrol officers, the Detroit Police Department reduced specialty units deemed less essential and shifted almost 100 officers from those units to patrol responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, in the NYPD, when parts of the administrative operations were shutting down to limit contact with the public, the agency moved resources from

### Agency Spotlight

The understaffed Chicago Police Department tracked the number of officers off duty due to exposure or illness using an automated dashboard. The dashboard issued alerts when staffing dropped too low and could be analyzed by district, shift, or the entire department to identify the places or times of day that needed coverage the most and reallocate officers accordingly.

Source: PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," April 7, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril7>; PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," June 3, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune3>.

administration to support patrol functions. This way, the agency added 500 officers to the street to backfill patrol shifts.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the Volusia County (Florida) Sheriff's Office leveraged staff from closed courthouses to add supplementary staffing when resources were short.<sup>71</sup> The Wake County (Texas) Sheriff's Office leveraged staff from other departments to assist with processing gun permits when officers were overwhelmed with backlogged requests.<sup>72</sup>

Some departments proactively cross-trained their employees to better prepare for coverage. The Rockingham County (North Carolina) Sheriffs' Office cross-trained deputies in a variety of function areas so that they could be reallocated if needed.<sup>73</sup> The Bergen County, New Jersey, Prosecutor's Office similarly consolidated investigators from focused squads to a combined detectives bureau to cross-train investigators and ensure coverage should any employee fall ill.<sup>74</sup>

The NYPD also created a task force of existing employees to support education, enforcement, and backup to calls for service. They performed pandemic-specific duties such as ensuring compliance with public health orders, confirming the closing of nonessential businesses, responding to COVID-19 related complaints, and educating the public on face masks. Personnel were assigned to consistent areas so that officers could learn about their assigned communities and respond most appropriately.<sup>75</sup>

Where possible, some agencies leveraged existing non-police resources. To separate police employees, the Janesville (Wisconsin) Police Department opened two temporary substations housed in vacant schools that had transitioned to remote learning. Two offsite teams were also created and tasked with proactive problem solving rather than field response.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, detectives in the Dallas Police Department worked out of nine libraries across the city to allow for physical distance during interviews and interrogations.<sup>77</sup>

### **Implementation of remote operations**

With a dispersed workforce, virtual communication and collaboration became crucial. At the Washington, D.C., Office of Unified Communications, recent deployable technology allowed employees to work remotely.<sup>78</sup> Technology helped call takers conduct COVID-19 screenings of callers via video,<sup>79</sup> helped notify officers of community members or incidents posing an elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission, allowed officers to screen community members in the field, let police departments gather evidence from community members electronically, and enhanced communication without the need for in-person interaction.<sup>80</sup> Many police departments, including the Detroit Police Department, enhanced their electronic capacity to take virtual crime reports and minimize the need for officers to respond to nonessential calls for service.<sup>81</sup>

The Naperville (Illinois) Police Department encouraged officers to take reports over the phone to minimize physical contact. The Nashville (Tennessee) Metro Police Department issued similar direction that calls of a nonemergency and nonviolent nature in which the perpetrator was not present were to be managed over the phone.<sup>82</sup> As a virtual response—or an in-person response that had to take place outdoors—may have been unexpected to some callers, the Allen (Texas) Police Department sent text messages to callers to explain the new pandemic protocols.<sup>83</sup>

### Technology Spotlight

Through innovations in technology, the Alexandria (Virginia) Department of Emergency and Customer Communications answered calls for service remotely. First, only non-emergency calls were fielded remotely, but after the system demonstrated success, emergency calls were fielded remotely as well.

Source: PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," August 21, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidaugust21>.

The Lincoln (Nebraska) Police Department instituted the possibility of remote work, even for uniformed patrol officers. During an eight-week period, at least one officer and one sergeant could work from home for five to 10 days depending on their schedule. Officers working from home were assigned calls for service that could be handled remotely, as in cases where there was no evidence to collect. Support staff were also allowed to work from home in some cases, and the mayor created a new category of pandemic leave for city employees to take time off for certain COVID-19–related conditions.<sup>84</sup>

Patrol duties were not the only police functions to be altered. In Carlsbad, California, detectives were divided into five teams with one sergeant on each team. Each team worked from the office one day per week and remotely the other four days.<sup>85</sup> The Tennessee Bureau of Investigations and the Rhode Island State Police adopted similar rotating schedules. Forensic personnel also had the opportunity to work remotely on report writing and other activities, which allowed them to limit their in-person exposure to critical forensic lab activities.

### Technology Spotlight

The Boston (Massachusetts) Police Department purchased laptops and smartphones that were compatible with body-worn cameras so that officers could upload their camera footage remotely without having to enter the office space.

Source: "Welcome & Plenary: Technological Innovation in the Age of COVID-19," presentation given online at IACP Tech Conference, June 24, 2020.

In the Kirkland (Washington) Police Department, records personnel working remotely had challenges maintaining connectivity and efficiency while working from home, which led the department to create a schedule allowing two people in the office at a time with appropriate distance between them.<sup>86</sup>

CompStat meetings were conducted virtually,<sup>87</sup> and video conferences were used in court.<sup>88</sup> Similar approaches were used in investigations. The Nampa (Idaho) Police Department continued to conduct sexual assault examinations to ensure continuity of operations, but the detective and the victim witness advocate participated virtually. For other investigative interviews, investigators asked victims to meet them in public parks or other open-air spaces.<sup>89</sup> If an indoor location was necessary to ensure privacy, large conference rooms were used for interviews to allow for physical distance between investigators and those being interviewed.<sup>90</sup>

In some cases, interviews were conducted over the phone or through online video chat. Counseling for victims and survivors was offered virtually, as well.<sup>91</sup> Some states allowed victims of domestic violence to request protection orders electronically.<sup>92</sup> The Salem (Oregon) Police Department leveraged an online victim notification network that allowed both officers and victims to search for offenders and identify if they were in custody. Through this system, users could register to receive notifications if the offender's custody status had changed, helping to allay victims' fears.<sup>93</sup> Hearings and interviews with judges were also conducted remotely.<sup>94</sup>

In preparation for an expected storm, the Hampton (Virginia) Police Department combined its EOC with a virtual operations center. Only persons in key roles worked from the EOC to allow space for physical distancing. Other involved personnel worked virtually.<sup>95</sup>

### Evolution of recruitment and training

Police agencies made changes to the recruiting process by expanding the use of technology.<sup>96</sup> In the Arlington (Virginia) Police Department, applicants were regularly screened with a questionnaire and temperature checks. Physical distancing was emphasized, as were strict sanitization procedures and the use of PPE. Even the polygraph procedure was adjusted to allow for appropriate distance between the applicant and the polygrapher, along with the use of PPE.<sup>97</sup>

### Technology Spotlight

The Fairfax County (Virginia) Police Department turned to social media to host a virtual career fair and teleconferences for its recruiting outreach information sessions. At the Arlington County (Virginia) Police Department, interviews were conducted remotely, while the Chandler (Arizona) Police Department virtually conducted oral board exams, background investigations, and interviews with the chief.

Source: PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," June 12, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune12>.

## Resource Spotlight

The Montana Law Enforcement Academy shares how it tackled continuity of operations as the single institution training the majority of law enforcement in the state in the *CRI-TAC COVID-19 Field Feature: Keeping Montana Officers Trained During a Pandemic*: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0937-pub.pdf>.



Agencies modified their training protocols. Although some in-person training was canceled or postponed, other training courses were adapted to allow for continuity. The IACP State and Provincial Police Academy Directors (SPPAD) described a number of mitigation strategies implemented across the United States to reduce recruits' exposure, such as daily health screenings, social distancing practices in the cafeteria or having food delivered to the classroom, use of disposable containers for food, and hand sanitizing stations across recruit campuses. The Washington (D.C.) Metropolitan Police Department continued its academy classes with precautionary measures in place to maintain physical distance and limit potential exposure,<sup>98</sup> as did the Minneapolis Police Department<sup>99</sup> and the New Orleans Police

Department.<sup>100</sup> Some agencies continued training in a limited capacity, prioritizing new hires over in-service training, like the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).<sup>101</sup> Further, the LAPD proactively contacted the state Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) Commission to seek advice on hypothetical scenarios, such as what to do if recruits tested positive and missed instruction time, and how to create contingency plans. Based on the POST's advice, all recruits and instructors were tested every week, with temperature checks daily. Masks were always worn, and classes were held outdoors when possible.<sup>102</sup>

Some agencies stopped in-person training altogether but continued training in topics that could be offered online.<sup>103</sup> The Baltimore Police Department, which had never offered academy training in a virtual format prior

## Technology Spotlight

The Phoenix Police Department offered online exams for its recruit classes. In some agencies, remote testing raised concerns about honesty, and so recruits filmed themselves taking tests using a cell phone video feed to ensure integrity. The Baltimore Police Department adopted this approach, with strict documentation of attendance and video monitoring, as did the New Orleans Police Department.

Source: PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," June 12, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune12>; PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," August 4, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidaugust4>.

to the pandemic, recognized the emergent situation and approved virtual training with certain conditions imposed to ensure accountability.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, when trainees at the Massachusetts State Police Academy were sent home to quarantine, they continued training online. Because of this adjustment, they were ultimately ready to graduate five weeks earlier than planned.<sup>105</sup> Some agencies even found that offering courses online reduced costs. However, while online learning can be convenient and cost-effective, experts cautioned that effective adult learning requires interaction, and any on-demand training should at least be supplemented with live video conferences to discuss the material.<sup>106</sup>

Field training was adjusted, too. In the Green Bay (Wisconsin) Police Department, trainees and training officers drove in separate cars during field training. Although the agency acknowledged this solution was not ideal, they felt it necessary to keep officers physically separated to reduce the risk of exposure and spread of COVID-19.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, in preparation for work in the field, officers trained while wearing PPE to better navigate the potential hindrances of drawing a weapon while wearing gloves or fogged glasses while breathing heavily with a mask.<sup>108</sup>

In-service training for existing employees was also moved online where possible. The New Orleans Police Department temporarily modified in-service training and developed online courses. At the same time, they planned for two possible scenarios for their 2021 training—one for if COVID remained an issue, and another if not—so that they would be prepared in either case.<sup>109</sup>

Other agencies incorporated simulation training into their curricula. This was especially helpful for firearms and shooting training. To practice defensive tactics and scenario-based training, participants were assigned permanent partners, wore hazmat suits, or substituted equipment like yoga blocks in place of another person. In the Portland (Oregon) Emergency Communications Bureau, new call takers and dispatchers were trained in a simulation room that allowed for greater physical distance between trainees.<sup>110</sup>

### **Restructured operations**

Many agencies closed their buildings to public visitors but maintained operations and service. The LAPD's buildings were closed to the public but remained operational. Community members were encouraged to report matters over the phone or via email rather than coming to a station in person.<sup>111</sup> The Omaha (Nebraska) Police Department also closed its doors to the public but created a call center to resolve low-priority incidents.<sup>112</sup>



Where facilities remained open, temperature checks were often instituted upon entry,<sup>113</sup> masks or other PPE were mandated,<sup>114</sup> and decontamination procedures were implemented. The Voorhees Township (New Jersey) Police Department established specific decontamination procedures for any equipment taken outside the station. Officers were also encouraged to shower and change at the police station at the end of their shifts to avoid bringing any contaminants from the station or the field home with them; the Carlsbad (California) Police Department set up a mobile shower trailer for this purpose.<sup>115</sup> The Chicago Police Department instituted a rule that if there were two or more cases of COVID-19 in a single district, the district station would be disinfected. Contact tracing was also conducted, and employees who might have been exposed were notified.<sup>116</sup>

Operations that had traditionally been performed indoors were moved outside to allow for better air circulation. The New Orleans Police Department moved its roll calls outdoors,<sup>117</sup> and the Marshfield (Wisconsin) Police Department encouraged its officers to interact with community members, including victims and complainants, outdoors when possible. The Naperville (Illinois) Police Department issued similar recommendations for officers to take any reports that had to be taken in person outdoors.<sup>118</sup> Likewise, the New York City Administration for Children's Services had to adjust its protocols for visiting families to investigate complaints of abuse or neglect; rather than entering private homes, investigators talked to parents and children outside and then asked for a video tour inside the home via phone.<sup>119</sup>

## Technology Spotlight

Even sanitation procedures were enhanced by technology. In Wisconsin, sheriffs purchased UVC disinfectant robots to disinfect building areas and vehicles.

**Source:** Source: National Sheriffs' Association, Weekly State Executive Conference Call, Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association status report, May 20, 2020.

## Agency Spotlight

Following a state mandate, starting in October 2020 NYPD officers were ordered to wear masks in public when adequate physical distance was not possible. Officers who did not comply could be subject to disciplinary action.

Source: Joseph Ostapiuk, "Report: NYPD Instructs Officers to Wear Masks or Face Discipline," *Staten Island Advance*, October 5, 2020, <https://www.police1.com/coronavirus-covid-19/articles/report-nypd-instructs-officers-to-wear-masks-or-face-discipline-oLOLbJRhbqXQLV0o/>.

When officers had to interact with community members, they were urged not to touch documents or other property belonging to the other person. During traffic stops, officers asked drivers to show their license and registration and would read the documents or take a photo rather than touching them. In some agencies, footage from body-worn cameras was considered a record of a traffic stop interaction, so as to avoid gathering a physical signature

from the driver. Similarly, summonses and other official documents were delivered through the mail rather than in person.<sup>120</sup>

Call centers adapted their procedures to include questions screening for COVID-19 so that officers could be better prepared to respond accordingly. Although calls were resolved over the phone whenever possible, call takers in Atlanta and Baltimore asked callers about any symptoms related to COVID-19 before dispatching an officer to calls that required in-person response.<sup>121</sup> Similar protocols were instituted statewide in places like Oregon and North Dakota.<sup>122</sup>

### Agency Spotlight

In order to protect officers and passengers from COVID-19, the San Bernardino (California) Police Department purchased police vehicles with nonporous surfaces and sealed rear passenger compartments with separate heating and air conditioning systems. These vehicles were available to transport persons with signs or symptoms of COVID-19.

Source: Brian Whitehead, "Police Cars Resistant to COVID-19 Could Come to Calif. City," *San Bernardino County Sun*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.police1.com/coronavirus-covid-19/articles/police-cars-resistant-to-covid-19-could-come-to-calif-city-FqLosaP6AKzZn2Zu/>.

Additional adaptations to the work environments of call centers helped ensure continuity of operations while protecting the health and safety of personnel. The Carlsbad (California) Police Department's dispatch center sealed off areas to prevent cross-contamination.<sup>123</sup> In San Francisco, the EOC was moved into the Moscone Convention Center, as the larger spaced allowed for more distance between EOC personnel.<sup>124</sup> The Charleston (South Carolina) Police Department's Public Safety Operations Center worked from several different places rather than congregating in a single area. Many of its operations were also shifted to virtual teleconferencing platforms.<sup>125</sup> The Portland (Maine) Police Department similarly established a mobile command center to allow further separation between employees.<sup>126</sup> Similar approaches implementing secondary call centers or separating staff into groups were adopted in Lincoln, Nebraska; Cayuga County, New York; Alachua County, Florida; and other locations, along with enhanced cleaning and sanitizing procedures.<sup>127</sup>

### Reduced enforcement activities

To minimize physical contact with others, many agencies enforced minor offenses less heavily than they had prior to the pandemic.<sup>128</sup> The Detroit police chief changed the policy manual to reduce physical encounters between officers and community members. Under the new changes, minor misdemeanors did not require enforcement; instead, officers were given more discretion to judge whether the risk of interaction was worth the enforcement action, so as to appropriately manage their safety and the safety of community members.<sup>129</sup> To help clarify the changes, the chief also gave daily briefings to staff with direction as to which tasks should be paused or continued.<sup>130</sup>

The Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Sheriff's Department looked to limit the number of persons brought into the jail for minor or nonviolent crimes and directed local police departments to begin issuing court summonses in lieu of arrest.<sup>131</sup> To cope with increased absenteeism, the Snohomish County (Washington) Sheriff's Office developed incremental operational phases to prioritize work based on the personnel capacity at any given time. Phases are defined by 10–19 percent, 20–29 percent, and 30–39 percent absentee levels; at each phase, different responses to calls for service are prescribed based on type of service needed and priority.<sup>132</sup> Officers in the Grand Ronde (Oregon) Tribal Police Department were given direction to continue drug investigations only in cases of felony offenses; it was not worth the risk of entering someone's home for minor offenses.<sup>133</sup>

To help guide discretionary decisions about enforcement, the Burlington (North Carolina) Police Department adapted the PERF Critical Decision-Making Model for COVID-19, which encouraged officers to collect information, assess the situation, consider agency policy, identify the best course of action, and review the outcomes.<sup>134</sup>

Citations, summonses, and desk appearance tickets were used as enforcement measures in lieu of physical arrest in agencies such as those in Buffalo Grove and Chicago in Illinois;<sup>135</sup> Lancaster County, Nebraska, and New Orleans, Louisiana;<sup>136</sup> Rockford, Illinois;<sup>137</sup> and Yonkers, New York.<sup>138</sup> Some agencies also worked in conjunction with courts to identify alternatives to arrest and speed up pretrial services.<sup>139</sup>

In agencies like the Dunwoody (Georgia) Police Department, the South Burlington (Vermont) Police Department,<sup>140</sup> and the Buffalo Grove (Illinois) Police Department,<sup>141</sup> officers were also issued direction to limit traffic stops, only stopping drivers for serious violations. The Wayne County (Michigan) Sheriff's Office continued to make traffic stops, but instead of tickets, drivers were given warnings combined with COVID care packages containing PPE and hygiene supplies.<sup>142</sup> The Oakland (California) Police Department stopped towing vehicles in many cases,<sup>143</sup> the Miami-Dade Police Department waived its late fees for red-light camera violations,<sup>144</sup> and the Gloucester Township (New Jersey) Police Department similarly curbed pedestrian contacts to limit interpersonal contact.<sup>145</sup>

## **Collaborative partnerships**

Creating new relationships or leveraging existing relationships with local counterparts, community partners, and businesses led to increased efficiency and allowed agencies to work together to accomplish common goals. In some places, partnerships were established through formal mutual aid agreements between police agencies in neighboring jurisdictions. This was especially helpful to smaller agencies like those in Avon Lake, Ohio;<sup>146</sup> Riverside, Illinois;<sup>147</sup> West, Texas;<sup>148</sup> and Jefferson County, Colorado.<sup>149</sup>

When all officers in the Lone Star (Texas) Police Department tested positive for coronavirus, other local agencies, including the Morris County Sheriff's Office and the Daingerfield Police Department, stepped in to provide backup support.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, when half of the small sheriff's office of Quitman County, Georgia, contracted COVID-19, neighboring agencies including the Harris County Sheriff's Office, the Muscogee County Sheriff's Office, and the Georgia State Patrol offered assistance.<sup>151</sup> In Texas, deputies from the Galveston County Sheriff's Office fulfilled police duties for the Kemah Police Department and the Hitchcock Police Departments when both agencies were understaffed because of COVID-19 infections.<sup>152</sup>

These collaborations expanded beyond police agencies. In New Jersey, law enforcement and health care systems shared resources with one another and across local jurisdictions. When one part of the state or region was overwhelmed or understaffed, resources were reallocated to provide support where it was most needed.<sup>153</sup> Members of the New Jersey Attorney General's Office were also assigned to the New Jersey State Police command center to advise on issues related to enforcement.<sup>154</sup> In Snohomish County, Washington, the Department of Emergency Management monitored sick leave and PPE supply levels each day for law enforcement agencies in the county.<sup>155</sup> In Houston, Texas, the Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security leveraged a series of supply chain working groups that had been created years earlier to protect against natural hazards and threats to critical infrastructure; during the COVID-19 pandemic, those working groups were expanded to include police, food supply networks, and COVID-19 testing facilities.<sup>156</sup> The University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh Police Department had experienced a norovirus outbreak in the past, and, drawing lessons from that experience, they conducted exercises to prepare for COVID-19 response.<sup>157</sup>

Even within single agencies, employees served multiple roles, where appropriate. In the NYPD, police officers who were also trained as nurses served the dual roles of providing police duties and following up with officers who fell ill.<sup>158</sup> When schools shifted from in-person to virtual learning, the

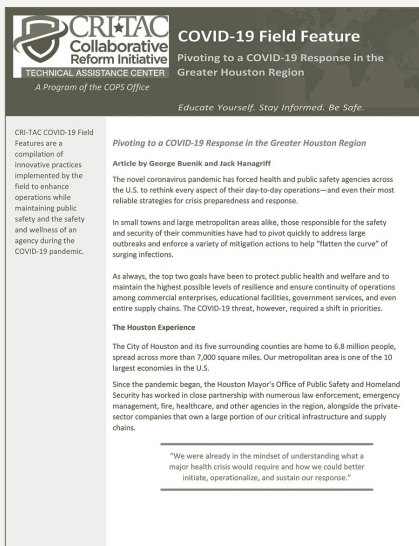
## Resource Spotlight

The Riverside (Illinois) Police Department details the importance of collaboration in ensuring public safety response in the *CRI-TAC COVID-19 Field Feature: Historic Pact Between Neighboring Agencies Offers Aid During Global Pandemic*: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0938-pub.pdf>.



## Resource Spotlight

*CRI-TAC COVID-19 Field Feature: Pivoting to a COVID-19 Response in the Greater Houston Region* describes the measures taken to manage health and critical infrastructure during the pandemic by the local partnerships in which Houston's law enforcement community participates, including a regional supply chain group: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0936-pub.pdf>.



St. Landry Parish (Louisiana) Sheriff's Office (SLPSO) aided employees with children who were struggling to balance work with virtual schooling and lack of childcare. Through the Children and Parents Education Relief System (CAPERS), SLPSO employees were allowed to bring their children to work with them to better juggle the demands of having to serve multiple roles as parent, teacher, and employee of the sheriff's office simultaneously. Children were allowed to use the department's internet connection for their schoolwork, and a department employee picked up lunch from the school and brought it to the children in the office each day. To maintain structure and normalcy, time was specifically designated throughout the day for activities like lunch and recess.<sup>159</sup>

## Communication tools and information sharing

Agencies improved their operations during the pandemic by sharing ideas, trends, and lessons learned with one another. In St. Petersburg, Florida, the sheriff was designated as the central point of contact for police across the

county.<sup>160</sup> In Alabama, a communication thread system was coordinated allowing every sheriff in the state and the law enforcement coordinator for the state attorney general to remain in close contact at all times.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, in Massachusetts, sheriffs across the state held daily calls to share their experiences and lessons learned.<sup>162</sup>

As employees were encouraged to work remotely or in other physically distant capacities, strong and consistent communication even within a single agency became increasingly important.<sup>163</sup> The Clearwater (Florida) Police Department relied less on email and turned to video conferencing and phone calls. This better allowed staff to maintain personal connections with one another and kept supervisors better informed of issues related to stress, fatigue, and burnout. To better facilitate two-way communication in the Aurora (Illinois) Police Department, leadership set up a forum

### Technology Spotlight

The California Peace Officers' Association (CPOA) hosted facilitated discussions online via Zoom to discuss the pandemic, the mental and physical health of first responders, and ideas for operational improvement. These calls were well received—so much so that CPOA opened them beyond California to agencies across the country.

Source: Nancy Perry, "Virtual Discussions Share Best Practices for Police Response during COVID-19," *Police1*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.police1.com/chiefs-sheriffs/articles/virtual-discussions-share-best-practices-for-police-response-during-covid-19-a1vmuUTgFyc58QFA/>.

### Technology Spotlight

Agency leaders leaned on technology to communicate with their employees. Miami (Florida) Chief Jorge Colina and Tucson (Arizona) Chief Chris Magnus sent regular video updates to staff informing them of new procedures, explaining responses, and addressing potential concerns.

Source: PERF, "How Agencies are Responding – Employee Emotional Wellness," accessed November 24, 2021, <https://www.policeforum.org/coronavirus#agency>.

that allowed employees to share concerns or criticisms anonymously. The chief reviewed submissions daily and addressed employee concerns in department-wide communication where appropriate. Leadership at the LAPD briefed the agency twice daily on the number of employees who had tested positive for COVID-19, the number of tests pending results, and the number of employees being quarantined.<sup>164</sup>

It was also important for supervisors to communicate accurate and up to date information to their officers so that officers could in turn educate the community about public health orders and other restrictions, as well as about enforcement actions.<sup>165</sup> Police were encouraged to minimize interpersonal interaction, which often meant more lenient enforcement (see [Reduced enforcement activities beginning on page 24](#)), and the expectations placed on police to enforce public health orders were often unclear. To help guide officers' decisions, the PERF Advisory Board suggested that police leaders work closely with crime analysts to examine crime rates, identify which issues were most severe in their jurisdiction, and prioritize police activity accordingly using data to guide officers' decisions.<sup>166</sup>

Communication within the course of police functions had to evolve, too, and agencies developed creative strategies for victim engagement. Many departments leveraged technology such as video and phone interviews or remote cameras in the field, such as the Nampa (Idaho) Police Department, which relied mostly on remote interviews.<sup>167</sup> When interviews had to be conducted

in person, they took place in large rooms, and participants wore appropriate PPE. The Houston Police Department, for example, used large conference rooms to allow for physical distance between investigators and those being interviewed.<sup>168</sup> Agencies across the country worked with community partners to identify service providers who could work via video conferencing or other technology to ensure continuity of legal representation, trauma therapy sessions, victim reparations, and more.

### Leveraging financial aid

Federal financial resources such as the CARES Act helped offset diminishing revenues to support public service agencies during the pandemic. Large municipal agencies such as those in Detroit, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles were able to apply for federal aid under the CARES Act, but smaller agencies were not eligible to apply and had to rely instead on funding allocated through their states.<sup>169</sup> Most areas, such as South Dakota, prioritized funding for first responders to ensure public safety.<sup>170</sup> In El Paso County, Texas, this funding was used to upgrade security within the county jail to reduce the spread of COVID-19.<sup>171</sup> Some agencies, such as the Maine Sheriffs' Association<sup>172</sup> and the Jefferson County (Alabama) Sheriff's Office,<sup>173</sup> paid their employees hazard pay for working through the conditions of the pandemic. Additional stimulus packages throughout the year continued to help support public safety operations.<sup>174</sup>

### Resource Spotlight

The National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), through CRI-TAC, developed a COVID-19 information clearinghouse on the NSA website, facilitated conference calls, and hosted webinars to promote information sharing with the field. From March 6 to July 15, 2020, the COVID-19 Communication Cell provided updates to the 42 state sheriffs' associations with actionable information and relevant news clips, including 257 real-time email updates and scam alert infographics. On March 25, 2020, the NSA also began hosting weekly conference calls with the state sheriffs' associations to provide information from subject matter experts and highlight the pandemic response in certain states. The weekly calls ended on July 15, 2020; an October 2020 after-action report and other resources can be found at <https://www.sheriffs.org/coronavirus>.

### Technology Spotlight

The Baltimore (Maryland) Police Department's Data Driven Strategies Division identified a need to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the agency and the community. To address this need, they created their own situational awareness dashboards for command staff, displaying data visualization and metrics summarizing the impact of COVID-19 on PPE, calls for service, staffing, and agency member health. These dashboards helped the agency to make informed operational decisions based on resource allocation and need.

Source: A. Vaught and J. Iwashita, "Police Data Behind the Pandemic Response: Policing Through COVID-19," <https://www.policefoundation.org/onpolicing/police-data-behind-the-pandemic-response-policing-through-covid-19/>.

## Tribal agencies

### Challenges

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted tribal communities because of their high prevalence of risk conditions like diabetes, lack of running water, and multiple generations living closely with one another.<sup>175</sup> These increased risks were seen in the White Mountain Apache Tribe, where just four months into the pandemic, one-eighth of the tribe had contracted the virus and 20 tribal residents had died.<sup>176</sup> In an attempt to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, tribal police set up roadblocks and checkpoints to limit traffic in and out of tribal lands, but adjacent government authorities ordered many to be removed. Both the Cheyenne River and Oglala Sioux tribes were threatened with lawsuits after installing checkpoints and refusing to move them.<sup>177</sup>

Moreover, one of the biggest funding sources for tribal law enforcement agencies is revenue generated from tribal casinos, more than 500 of which were closed because of the pandemic. These closures left almost 700,000 workers without jobs, and tribal jurisdictions suffered economically.<sup>178</sup> Adding to this difficulty, when Tribal Governments sought funding from the Federal Government under the CARES Act, disbursement was delayed<sup>179</sup> (though ultimately granted<sup>180</sup>).

### Adaptations

Tribal police departments across the country began to implement measures to slow the spread of the virus in their communities. The Navajo Police Department began enforcing curfews, for which violators would receive 30 days in jail or a \$1,000 fine. In addition, if anyone knowingly exposed officers to COVID-19, they could be charged with battery against a police officer.<sup>181</sup> The Grand Ronde Police Department implemented sanitization techniques, allowed officers to wash their uniforms in the office after finishing their shifts, and purchased equipment to fully sanitize vehicles if officers were exposed while on duty.<sup>182</sup> In the White Mountain Apache Tribe, those who left the area of their own yards risked receiving fines. Later, a shelter-in-place order was issued and use of alcohol was banned. Closed casinos were converted to housing for COVID-positive homeless members of the tribe.<sup>183</sup>

Communication and enhanced collaboration with stakeholders of tribal police departments played an important role in mitigating impacts of the virus. For example, the Oneida Nation Emergency Management Department created an Incident Command Team that included the chief of police, public health officials, the business committee, and the COVID-19 Core Team.<sup>184</sup> Similarly, to assist with needs in their community, the Blackfeet Law Enforcement Service signed an agreement to gain assistance from the Glacier County (Montana) Sheriff's Office when their services become overwhelmed.<sup>185</sup>



## Correctional institutions

### Challenges

Limiting COVID-19 exposure of incarcerated individuals and staff in correctional facilities was a challenge—one compounded by the dense populations of these facilities and lack of access to testing supplies for both staff and incarcerated individuals. Data from spring 2020 showed infection rates in correctional facilities more than twice as high as in the general population; these rates grew to more than 5.5 times higher by June 2020, according to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.<sup>186</sup> For example, almost 80 percent of incarcerated individuals in the Marion County, Ohio, Correctional Institution tested positive for COVID-19 in April 2020,<sup>187</sup> and in Indiana, 104 of 231 incarcerated individuals tested by the Johnson County Sheriff's office tested positive for the coronavirus in May 2020.<sup>188</sup> Initial data collected by the Marshall Project further reflected that, of those who contracted COVID-19, incarcerated individuals were up to four times more likely to die than correctional staff. Multiple factors may have impacted this rate, including the aging population in prisons relative to the average age of corrections staff and the accessibility of COVID-19 tests and timely treatment.<sup>189</sup>

Because of prison overcrowding, it was extremely difficult to enforce physical distancing between incarcerated individuals in correctional settings. The Virginia Department of Corrections, for example, has 80-person pods with two or more people living in each cell, making it easy for the virus to spread.<sup>190</sup> The transfer of incarcerated individuals from facility to facility also posed risks. The Fresno County (California) Sheriff's Office had 13 positive cases after newly incarcerated individuals arrived at Wasco State Prison.<sup>191</sup>

In Mobile County, Alabama, the sheriff's office had enough testing equipment to test their staff but did not have enough testing supplies to test incarcerated individuals.<sup>192</sup> Kleburg and Dallas Counties in Texas and Wayne County in Michigan also experienced shortages in resident testing.<sup>193</sup> Similarly, as of June 2020, the Jacksonville (Florida) Sheriff's Office reported 20 positive cases but had only tested 100 out of 2,706 incarcerated individuals.<sup>194</sup>

The Smith County (Texas) Sheriff's Office implemented professional cleaning and disinfecting procedures, but residents and employees continued to test positive for the virus.<sup>195</sup> In Gregg County, Texas, the jail's nursing facilities were drastically understaffed and underprepared to respond to the pandemic. At one point, there were nine nurses for more than 50 COVID-19–infected incarcerated individuals.<sup>196</sup>

Members of the public questioned whether correctional institutions were taking enough precautions.<sup>198</sup> The Cook County (Illinois) Sheriff's Office was questioned on whether their procedures met Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.<sup>198</sup> Attorneys in Wayne County, Michigan, filed a suit on behalf of five incarcerated individuals who claimed that conditions were so unsanitary as to be unconstitutionally harmful.<sup>199</sup> The Clayton County (Georgia) Sheriff's Office also faced a suit for failing to protect incarcerated individuals from COVID-19 in the community jails.<sup>200</sup>

Mental health conditions are often exacerbated when individuals enter the prison system with a pre-existing or underlying mental health condition and may have worsened further during the pandemic. The Trumbull County (Ohio) Sheriff's Office reported that isolation related to COVID-19 procedures led to more mental health and addiction issues within their resident population than ever before.<sup>201</sup>

The correctional workforce was also greatly affected by the pandemic. The Chattooga County (Georgia) Sheriff's Office had difficulty covering shifts because of the number of employees who had contracted the virus or were quarantining out of precaution.<sup>202</sup> Similar circumstances were also seen in New York State, where one sheriff had to furlough an entire shift of officers because of COVID-19 exposure.<sup>203</sup> The Wayne County (Michigan) Sheriff's Office reported that 208 employees at its facility had tested positive as of July 22, 2020.<sup>204</sup> Improper safety measures may have contributed to the spread of COVID-19 among correctional staff; for example, in September 2020 many correctional officers in Thurston County, Washington, were not wearing masks on duty despite a coronavirus outbreak amongst the prison population.<sup>205</sup>

Because of many state facilities' policies to not accept new individuals who had been exposed to the virus, exposed detainees were often held in local facilities that were also severely struggling in the pandemic. Jurisdictions that battled this challenge include Androscoggin County, Maine, where in May 2020 the local jail held more than a dozen incarcerated individuals because the state prison blocked the arrival of new individuals to that facility. Holding those who would have been placed in state prison increased the liability of local jail officials; normally, state facilities have more adequate medical and programmatic services for incarcerated individuals.<sup>206</sup>

These policies also added financial burdens to local facilities. In Illinois, county sheriffs' departments were unable to transfer incarcerated individuals who should have been in the custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections and were unable to receive reimbursement to cover the increased costs associated with holding additional individuals.<sup>207</sup> In Los Angeles County, the Board

of Supervisors voted to take funds away from the county's jail system and devote more money toward rehabilitation-based programs, which left the correctional system with fewer financial resources to combat the pandemic.<sup>208</sup>

In Bexar County, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice advised that they would no longer be accepting incarcerated individuals from other jurisdictions as they were already battling severe overcrowding.<sup>209</sup> As an alternative, some defendants were assigned electronic monitoring rather than incarceration; however, in Cook County, Illinois, the sheriff's office ran out of electronic monitoring bracelets to give to defendants because so many had been placed on electronic monitoring to alleviate pressure on the correctional population.<sup>210</sup>

## Adaptations

One way of reducing the risk of COVID-19 in correctional facilities was to reduce arrests to limit the incarcerated population. Across the country, many county-level agencies communicated with their law enforcement partners regarding procedures to assist in controlling the number of incarcerated individuals in the correctional population. An example of this can be seen in Douglas County, Oregon, where the Sheriff's Office urged law enforcement to use discretion in cases of low-level offenses and issue citations rather than take individuals into custody.<sup>211</sup> A similar recommendation was also issued in Faulkner County, Arkansas.<sup>212</sup>

Policies were implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by entry of new individuals into correctional facilities. For example, arrestees showing symptoms of the virus in New York City were processed via videoconference.<sup>213</sup> A similar process was implemented in San Diego, California, where all new individuals isolated for seven days and underwent a health screening before they could fully enter the correctional population.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, the Marion County (Florida) Sheriff's Office<sup>215</sup> and the Bradley County, Tennessee, Jail<sup>216</sup> included symptom screening in the booking process; any resident experiencing symptoms was immediately isolated pending further evaluation. Expanding upon these policies, the Tulsa County (Oklahoma) Sheriff's Office included rapid testing procedures for any resident who transferred facilities.<sup>217</sup>

To ensure the cleanliness of common spaces, correctional facilities established enhanced sanitization and PPE usage. The Douglas County (Oregon) Sheriff's Office increased its cleaning procedures.<sup>218</sup> In Lake County, Illinois, PPE was provided for all staff and incarcerated individuals, in addition to an increased supply of personal hygiene products.<sup>219</sup> In Johnson County, Indiana, hydroxyl generators were used to aid in air circulation and purification.<sup>220</sup> Similarly, Dane County, Wisconsin, used UV emitters in addition to an entirely new decontamination system.<sup>221</sup>

Across the country, correctional facilities developed strategies to limit the number of outside individuals entering a facility. As such, many face-to-face visitation opportunities for incarcerated individuals were suspended. Visitation prohibition was reported across multiple jurisdictions including Sumner County, Tennessee,<sup>222</sup> and Middlesex County, Massachusetts.<sup>223</sup> As an alternative to face-to-face visits, many facilities developed alternative methods of communication, including increases in remote visits in Oakland County, Michigan,<sup>224</sup> and noncontact visits in Suffolk County, New York.<sup>225</sup> In Grundy County, Tennessee, all visitations were suspended temporarily to stop the spread of COVID-19 throughout jail facilities.<sup>226</sup>

### Agency Spotlight

In the early stages of the pandemic, the Cook County Jail in Illinois had a difficult time controlling the virus's spread through the facility. Once revised policies and procedures were implemented to expand testing, enforce mask wearing, and leverage unused spaces for adequate social distancing, positive testing rates significantly declined.

Source: M. Crepeau, and A. Sweeney, "New CDC Review Finds Cook County Sheriff, Staff Successfully Stemmed Rising Tide of COVID-19 Cases at Jail," *Chicago Tribune*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-coronavirus-cdc-cook-county-jail-study-20200715-or4zoyranzf2dmg5fz6wzhwgem-story.html>.

Incarcerated individuals experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 were isolated, and physical distancing guidelines were enforced for all. The Federal Bureau of Prisons ordered a 14-day lockdown across all 122 of its facilities to limit the spread of COVID-19.<sup>227</sup> Facilities in Lake County, Illinois,<sup>228</sup> and Mobile, Alabama,<sup>229</sup> isolated all incarcerated individuals showing symptoms of the virus in units separate from the rest of the prison population. Because of the rate at which the virus spreads throughout individuals living in proximity, jurisdictions like the Fresno County (California) Sheriff's Office quarantined entire floors to prevent spread of the virus elsewhere in the facility.<sup>230</sup>

To mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through correctional facilities, medical screening protocols were implemented across the country. Institutions implemented screening procedures for all visitors, including taking visitors' temperatures and asking a series of questions to evaluate an individual's risk. In Ohio,<sup>231</sup> and other facilities across the country, there were drastic improvements in the rate at which incarcerated individuals and correctional staff were tested. This improvement generated more accurate data on the true rate of COVID-19 infection within the prison population. As a method of removing any stigma of symptom reporting, the Coastal State Prison in Georgia waived its \$5 medical co-pay so that incarcerated individuals would more willingly report and be evaluated for symptoms.<sup>232</sup>

Policy revisions mandated that staff and incarcerated individuals wear face coverings and enforced stricter physical distancing guidelines in common spaces. The Fresno County (California) Sheriff's Office issued incarcerated individuals two cloth masks each day, which were regularly washed and sanitized.<sup>233</sup>

### **Partnering for PPE Distribution**

On a nationwide scale, the National Sheriffs' Association and the REFORM Alliance championed a program to deliver PPE to every correctional facility across the country. By August 2020, the REFORM Alliance had distributed 6 million masks to jails and prisons.

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Source: National Sheriffs' Association, "Sheriffs Partner with Reform Alliance To Deliver PPE to Every Jail in America," press release, May 26, 2020, <https://sheriffs.org/SHERIFFS-PARTNER-REFORM-ALLIANCE-DELIVER-PPE-EVERY-JAIL-AMERICA>; REFORM Alliance, "About Us," accessed December 10, 2021, <http://reformalliance.wpengine.com/about/#>.

To alleviate the stress of implementing social distancing guidelines in overcrowded prisons, agencies explored the possibility of releasing individuals from incarceration. This approach was considered particularly for those reaching the end of their sentences, those in pretrial detention, and those at high risk of serious illness due to COVID-19 exposure. Such decarceration efforts in Minnesota led to an overall population reduction of jails and detention facilities by 50 percent statewide.<sup>234</sup> Similar strategies were implemented in Multnomah County, Oregon, where incarcerated individuals who had less than 30 days left on their sentences were released, and more individuals within the correctional facilities were moved to out-of-custody supervision.<sup>235</sup> In Dubuque County, Iowa, the sheriff's office planned to revive a home detention program to lower the number of individuals living in the correctional facility.<sup>236</sup> For those agencies that could not decarcerate, efforts were made to educate incarcerated populations on the importance of protecting their own health through proper mask wearing, sanitization, and social distancing to better mitigate the spread of the virus.<sup>237</sup>

In addition to these county-level efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 were state-level efforts such as proclamations, health mandates, emergency orders, and executive orders. The most common state-level effort was the suspension of transfers from local jails to state institutions and visitation to correctional institutions. Some states suspended all visitations, including attorney-related visits, while others suspended visitation by the general public, allowing for visitors with a legal purpose and religious leaders or clergy members. Other features included expedited release of offenders through the suspension of specific provisions (Colorado); commutation of sentences for inmates identified as particularly vulnerable (Kentucky); acceleration of parole, mandatory supervision, or home detention mandates (Maryland);

processes to grant reprieve (New Jersey); standards to avoid or prevent desperate release policies (Texas); and encouraging efforts to reduce pretrial incarceration, including the use of summonses by law enforcement in place of arrest (Virginia).<sup>238</sup>

Because of the rate at which COVID-19 spread through incarcerated populations, 12 states as of December 2020 had included this population in phase one of their vaccination rollout procedures.<sup>239</sup>

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# Theme 2. Community Impact

## Challenges

### Police-community engagement

During the pandemic, law enforcement leaders have sought to maintain effective community-police engagement by increasing transparency as the risks to public health and safety became apparent. Leaders were tasked with striking a balance in communication to raise awareness without creating a counterproductive narrative of fear.

Many agencies reported struggling with getting effective messaging out to the public, adding another dimension to ongoing media challenges often faced by law enforcement. Causes for this struggle include a decrease in town halls, community forums, and other in-person engagement activities and inconsistent messaging across agencies within the same state.<sup>1</sup> For example, according to Arizona state executives, a misleading media report led to an incorrect statewide belief that individuals testing positive for COVID-19 could be arrested.<sup>2</sup>

### Changes to Community-Oriented Policing Activities

Based on a national multi-wave survey conducted by the IACP and the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University, by March 23, 2020, 73 percent of responding agencies had adopted policies to reduce or limit community-oriented policing activities, while 39 percent of responding agencies had adopted specific policies to increase police presence in certain locations such as grocery stores, hospitals, or other public places. As of May 10, 2020, 64 percent of responding agencies continued to formally limit community-oriented policing activities.

Source: C. Lum, C. Maupin, C., and M. Stoltz, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Law Enforcement Agencies (Wave 2)," Report, June 2025, 2020 (Washington, DC: International Association of Chiefs of Police), [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/IACP\\_Covid\\_Impact\\_Wave2.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/IACP_Covid_Impact_Wave2.pdf).

COVID-19 also placed strains on community policing engagement efforts. In areas where tensions between police and the public were already high, agencies expressed concerns that enforcing certain orders such as mask mandates or limits on social gatherings could worsen the divide.<sup>3</sup> Agencies also identified a potential challenge in reaching undocumented communities that might hesitate to engage with any government entity, including testing centers.<sup>4</sup> Some states, such as New York,<sup>5</sup> noted a resistance to social distancing rules in African American and Hispanic neighborhoods due to a distrust of authority. Law enforcement executives recognized

the importance of working with community leaders, church groups, and others to assist in the communication of public health–related orders and especially of engaging with important services in historically marginalized communities that may lack trust in police, such as immigrant and minority communities.<sup>6</sup>

### **Disparate community impacts**

While COVID-19 impacted nearly everyone in some way, certain communities were affected more than others, especially vulnerable and immunocompromised populations. U.S. attention on COVID-19 ramped up when the spread of the illness among residents of a nursing home in Kirkland, Washington, made the news in February 2020.<sup>7</sup> The dire situation at the nursing home highlighted not only the vulnerabilities of congregate settings but also the general importance of special care for elderly populations. By March 2020, with much of the country shutting down, experts became concerned that a decrease in in-person communication, an increase in physical distancing, and the institution of stay-at-home orders could cause elderly individuals to be left unattended for extended periods of time.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, police reported that the elderly might have difficulty obtaining essential supplies for themselves.<sup>9</sup> The competing imperatives of necessary in-person care and maintaining physical distancing created a challenging situation for the elderly population.

Another vulnerable population were individuals experiencing homelessness, especially since stay-at-home orders were difficult for this community to follow. Unhoused persons often do not have access to traditional resources and face food and water insecurities, both of which exacerbated the pandemic's harmful effects on this population. Existing homeless shelters did not have enough space to adhere to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for physical distancing, while limiting their capacity left people unsheltered.<sup>10</sup> Further, some service providers were reluctant to visit shelters for fear of contracting the virus.<sup>11</sup> Among persons who relied on donations before the pandemic, Amtrak Police reported that panhandlers in New York, who had previously been collecting close to \$200 a day, were making much less. Amtrak Police also noted an increase in petty crimes, including shoplifting, pickpocketing, and cell phone theft.<sup>12</sup>

As the effects of COVID-19 started to become known, there were reports of COVID-19 disparately affecting communities of color for a variety of reasons, including distrust of public health and law enforcement. The pandemic's disproportionate impact on the African American, Native American, and Latinx communities have included higher COVID-19 infections and COVID-19–related fatalities.<sup>13</sup>

### **Disproportionate COVID Rates in Minority Communities**

African Americans make up about 27 percent of the population of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, but made up 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths as of August 2020.<sup>256</sup> In New Mexico, while Native Americans make up less than 11 percent of the population, they accounted for 57 percent of COVID-19 cases and had infection rates 14 times greater than the rest of the population as of May 2020.

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Sources: "BET Reports on COVID-19 Updates, Facts And News You Need to Know: Information on How Coronavirus Is Impacting the Global Black Community," December 14, 2020, <https://www.bet.com/article/wv3b6p/bet-reports-on-covid-19-updates-facts-and-the-news-you-need#>; E. Kaplan, and T. Davis, "'Huge Disparity' in COVID-19 Death Rates for Native Americans in NM," *Albuquerque Journal*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.abqjournal.com/1461218/huge-disparity-in-covid19-death-rates-for-native-americans-in-nm.html>.

### **Increase in mental health and substance abuse related calls**

From the onset of COVID-19, concerns for the overall mental health and well-being of communities were noted. Many people were subject to stay-at-home orders, and many more were laid off or furloughed from jobs, increasing stress at an already tense time.<sup>14</sup> In following local government mandates and CDC guidelines to stay inside their homes, individuals were isolated from their friends, families, and fellow community members. Disrupted routines and an increase in idle time may have negatively impacted individuals' mental health.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Toll on Mental Health**

A national survey of 1,141 law enforcement agencies in May 2020, conducted jointly by the IACP and Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University, revealed that 47 percent of responding agencies experienced an increase in calls related to mental distress during the month of April 2020 over the baseline of April 2019.

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Source: C. Lum, C. Maupin, C., and M. Stoltz, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Law Enforcement Agencies (Wave 2)," Report, June 2025, 2020 (Washington, DC: International Association of Chiefs of Police), [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/IACP\\_Covid\\_Impact\\_Wave2.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/IACP_Covid_Impact_Wave2.pdf).

Agencies around the country detected a rise in various mental health–related calls.<sup>16</sup> A large increase in texts to crisis hotlines,<sup>17</sup> as well as an increase in the number of calls for mental health and wellness checks,<sup>18</sup> were identified early at the onset of the pandemic. Simultaneously, COVID-19 led to increases in overdoses and overdose fatalities. In places like Mount Olive, New Jersey, mental health–related calls were linked to increased substance abuse calls.<sup>19</sup> The Roanoke County (Virginia) Police Department responded to nearly 90 overdoses (14 of which were fatal) in 2020, double the number in 2019.<sup>20</sup> Similar rises in drug and alcohol abuse have been seen throughout the United States.<sup>21</sup>

## Firearms

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Instant Criminal Background Check System showed a 41 percent increase in firearm sales during the first nine months of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>22</sup> The 2,892,115 checks added in September broke the 22-year record set by the system in 2019,<sup>23</sup> and the number of monthly checks continued to climb into 2021. The sale of ghost guns—kits sold with almost all the necessary components to make a weapon but without the required background check—also increased.<sup>24</sup>

### Accidental Shootings Increase

Deadly unintentional shootings by children increased 43 percent in March and April of 2020 compared to average gun deaths during the same two months in the last three years, according to data analyzed by advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety.

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Source: Everytown for Gun Safety, "Unintentional Shootings by Children Have Increased in March and April, New Analysis Shows," press release, May 8, 2020, <https://everytown.org/press/unintentional-shootings-by-children-have-increased-in-march-and-april-new-analysis-shows/>.

## Adaptations

Multistakeholder collaboration became an important stepping-stone in raising public awareness of the coronavirus. To better communicate with the public while adhering to physical distancing guidelines, the New Jersey State Police leveraged its fusion center as a center of operations. The center was used as a centralized point of information and helped to give officers and community members a clear and consistent message.<sup>25</sup>

### Agency Spotlight

The Charlottesville (Virginia) Police Department partnered with United Way and a local organization, Brave Souls on Fire, to offer "stress relief kits" that included masks, healthy snacks, anti-stress gadgets, gloves, antibacterial hand sanitizers, herbal teas, adult coloring books, local mental and physical health resources, coping flyers, crisis intervention team resources, COVID-19 frequently asked questions, and gift cards for other necessities.

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Source: Vera Institute, "Reducing Arrests and Supporting the Health of Communities and Officers," COVID-19 and Policing webinar series, April 13, 2020, <https://www.vera.org/events/covid-19-and-criminal-justice/covid-19-and-policing-webinar>.

Many agencies encouraged officers to rely more heavily on their communication and de-escalation skills rather than enforcement action in pandemic-related situations to avoid community backlash,<sup>26</sup> preferring officers take on the role of public health educators.

Conducting outreach efforts among vulnerable populations has been key during the pandemic. Agencies deployed specific units to engage with vulnerable communities to ensure access to resources. Through this approach, officers called or visited individuals to provide wellness checks.<sup>27</sup> Law enforcement agencies sought creative solutions to reach individuals experiencing homelessness. This included publicizing interactive maps for individuals to locate basic services, including hygiene stations, safe parking sites, or safe places to stay.<sup>28</sup> Creating and distributing hygiene kits, including paper towels, soap, and water, among the homeless population was another proactive approach taken by police agencies.<sup>29</sup> City planners and law enforcement agencies worked together to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus throughout the homeless community with programs designed to move these individuals into long-term housing options.<sup>30</sup>

## Technology Spotlight

In many cases, agencies used social media to provide COVID-19 information and to engage with the community. For example, the Allentown, Pennsylvania, mayor joined the police chief during the department's first online community meeting, held on the department's Facebook page, to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the community.

Sources: National Commission on Correctional Healthcare, COVID-19 Weekly Roundtable for Law Enforcement and Correctional Health Care, webinar series, May 1, 2020, <https://www.ncchc.org/blog/covid-19-weekly-roundtable-for-law-enforcement-correctional-health-care-webinar/>; PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," April 23, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril23/>; PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," April 24, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril24/>; PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," May 22, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay22/>; A. Scott, "'Take Care of Each Other,' Allentown Mayor O'Connell Urges during Police Department's First Online Community Meeting amid Coronavirus Crisis," *The Morning Call*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.mcall.com/2020/04/01/take-care-of-each-other-allentown-mayor-oconnell-urges-during-police-departments-first-online-community-meeting-amid-coronavirus-crisis/>.

## Youth Programming

To maintain community-police engagement with youth, law enforcement implemented new and adapted programs focused on children and teens. These virtual programs included nightly storytime readings, scavenger hunts, and online sessions on topics such as dating violence. Further, some agencies delivered laptops and lunches to students in need.

Sources: A. Jackson, "Police Departments Step Up to Help Keep Kids Busy While School is Out Due to Coronavirus Pandemic," *CNN News*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/18/us/police-helping-kids-out-of-school-trnd-wellness/index.html>; "Rosemount Police to Host Scavenger Hunt," *Sun ThisWeek*, August 13, 2020, [https://www.hometownsource.com/sun\\_thisweek/community/rosemount/rosemount-police-to-host-scavenger-hunt/article\\_45a01cdc-dd7f-11ea-9bc2-b31a4adb6a31.html](https://www.hometownsource.com/sun_thisweek/community/rosemount/rosemount-police-to-host-scavenger-hunt/article_45a01cdc-dd7f-11ea-9bc2-b31a4adb6a31.html); PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," August 6, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidaugust6>.

Law enforcement agencies also produced and disseminated videos regarding public health measures in multiple languages to reach immigrant and English language learner communities.<sup>31</sup> Agencies also tried to strengthen police-community engagement by conducting public outreach in a variety of languages to ensure community understanding of public health orders and guidelines.<sup>32</sup>

## Technology Spotlight

Though sometimes controversial, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), or drones, were used during the pandemic by some agencies to assist in diverse tasks. This included disseminating prerecorded public messages by using the onboard public address system to talk directly with the public; monitoring crowds and enforcing social distancing; and detecting potential COVID-19 symptoms, such as body temperatures, heart rates, and coughing. In order to engage and interact with those experiencing homelessness, the Calvert County (Maryland) Sheriff's Office and others used UAVs to broadcast important information.

Source: "New Jersey Town Uses Drones to Enforce Social Distancing," *Fox 29 News*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.fox29.com/news/new-jersey-town-uses-drones-to-enforce-social-distancing>; A. Lien, "Conn. Police to Test 'Pandemic Drone' that Monitors Health Activity, Social Distancing," *Police1*, April 22, 2020, <https://www.police1.com/police-products/police-drones/articles/conn-police-to-test-pandemic-drone-that-monitors-health-activity-social-distancing-F7rqR6rPqBl6Kd1f/>; K. Phillips, "Police Agencies Are Using Drones to Enforce Stay-at-Home Orders, Raising Concerns Among Civil Rights Groups," *USA Today*, May 3, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/05/03/coronavirus-police-use-drones-enforcement-privacy-concerns/3059073001/>; R. Panico, "Stop and Disperse! N.J. City Will Use Drones to Yell at People Not Social Distancing," *NJ.Com*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/04/stop-and-disperse-nj-city-will-use-drones-to-yell-at-people-not-social-distancing.html>; PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," June 5, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidjune5/>; A. Glaser, "Homeless People Are at Risk from the Coronavirus. Police Have a Contentious Solution: Drones," *NBC News*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/homeless-people-are-risk-coronavirus-police-have-contentious-solution-drones-n1191866>.

Gun safety advocates encouraged responsible gun safety practices. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommended storing guns unloaded and locked, with ammunition kept separately. The National Shooting Sports Foundation similarly urged all gun owners to lock their weapons when not in use, and the group offered safety videos and other resources for first-time gun owners. Other groups issued a variety of public service announcements to educate the community on gun safety.<sup>33</sup>

## Section Endnotes—Theme 2

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# Theme 3. Crime Trends

## Child abuse

### Challenges

#### **Increase in Child Abuse Reports**

By September 2020, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's CyberTipline had received more than 18 million reports of crimes against children—a 63 percent increase from the year before.

Source: B. O'Donnell, "COVID-19 and Missing and Exploited Children," Blog post, July 16, 2020, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, <https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2020/covid-19-and-missing-and-exploited-children>.

Concerns increased for the health and welfare of children during the pandemic, especially those living in abusive homes. Abusers may have been experiencing heightened stress from factors of the pandemic such as job loss, financial impacts, boredom, and increased drug and alcohol use. Prior to the pandemic, police were often notified of child abuse through the schools, but with the physical closing of schools and cancellation of youth activities, children were no longer interacting with teachers, coaches, and others who are required by law in most states to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect. This loss of opportunities for the detection of abuse increased children's vulnerability.

Although a survey of nationwide children's advocacy centers reported serving 40,000 *fewer* children in January through June of 2020 than in the same period in the previous year,<sup>1</sup> this pattern is likely due to the fact that many instances of child abuse were not detected soon enough. In many cases, child abuse was not detected until the child was taken to the emergency room, as seen in Texas when pediatricians began noticing an increase in serious cases of physical abuse.<sup>2</sup>

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) also reported that their data showed an increase in child sexual assault. Among callers to RAINN's hotline, 79 percent of victims reported that they were living with their perpetrator.<sup>3</sup> Online abuse also became more prevalent as daily activities and schooling moved to the virtual environment. Children using the internet at home became more vulnerable to exploitation, and reports to law enforcement of online abuse and child sexual exploitation material surged.<sup>4</sup>

## Adaptations

Law enforcement's response to the concerns and challenges around vulnerable children focused on implementing technology solutions, increasing education and awareness, and collaborating with community groups. The Children's Advocacy Center of Washington, D.C., quickly implemented options for teleforensic interviews and telehealth appointments.<sup>5</sup> Other advocacy groups encouraged all online learning platforms to add an option for children to report abuse while doing their schoolwork online.<sup>6</sup> Project VIC worked with technology companies and law enforcement agencies to compile a database of child abuse images, allowing police to conduct an automated comparison of seized images.<sup>7</sup>

Law enforcement agencies increased training on the risk factors of child abuse and how to recognize its signs. Various agencies emphasized the importance of policing minor violations of childcare (such as a child not properly restrained in a moving vehicle or a child left alone in a car), paying attention to small details during every interaction. This attentiveness was intended to prepare officers to be better able to identify abusive situations and prevent potentially abusive situations from escalating.<sup>8</sup> The Spokane County, Washington, Emergency Operations Center hosted representatives from each school district within the center and established an email address for school counselors reporting at-risk youth to police.<sup>9</sup>

Parents and caregivers were urged to monitor risk factors. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recommended parents and guardians educate themselves and their children about online child exploitation, including what constitutes abuse and how to report it.<sup>10</sup> Advocates against sexual assault urged adults to practice extra vigilance and to provide greater social and emotional support to the children in their lives,<sup>11</sup> and school districts dispersed information on self-coping mechanisms to help parents and caregivers avoid lashing out at their children.<sup>12</sup>

Advocates reminded the public that many services and programs for youth continued to operate throughout the pandemic, even if in a virtual capacity. Where possible, children's advocacy groups tried to reach children in new ways, such as including messages in supply bags or homework lessons.<sup>13</sup> Some school districts trained staff in how to spot potential signs of abuse virtually (in online classes or meetings) and how to talk to their students about the issue.<sup>14</sup> Strengthening partnerships across agencies became increasingly important for keeping at-risk youth safe.

## Domestic violence

### Challenges

Community members were increasingly encouraged to stay home during the pandemic, putting household members in near-constant proximity to one another. While this helped contain the spread of COVID-19 in the community, it created increased risks for domestic violence. As businesses—including shelters and services for victims of domestic violence—closed and daily activities moved to the virtual environment, opportunities outside the home became increasingly limited, and concerns intensified for the ability of victims to remain safe, report abuse, and seek help. For some domestic violence victims, sharing space with their partners all day limited the ability to reach out for help. The stresses of the pandemic, including economic hardships, combined with social isolation (itself another stressor) to create circumstances known to exacerbate interpersonal violence.<sup>15</sup>

Increases in domestic violence calls were noted across the United States, including in Portland, Oregon; Seattle;<sup>16</sup> Dane County, Wisconsin;<sup>17</sup> Kansas City, Missouri;<sup>18</sup> Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; Gloucester Township, New Jersey; Montgomery County, Texas; Nassau County, New York; Topeka, Kansas;<sup>19</sup> San Antonio, Texas;<sup>20</sup> and Houston.<sup>21</sup> There were variances in the data, however, as Austin, Texas, reported a decrease in domestic violence calls, as did Chandler, Arizona, and Chicago, Illinois.<sup>22</sup> Experts cautioned, however, that tracking domestic violence data can be a significant challenge and that call rates may not be indicative of what was happening in homes across the United States, particularly when victims are isolated from the outside world.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, concerns arose that perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence might be granted early release under certain circumstances in an effort to reduce prison populations, leaving their victims fearful of their return to society.<sup>24</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office on Violence Against Women, while state and tribal laws remain in effect on domestic violence, some jurisdictions may have flexibility under applicable laws to adopt new procedures allowing officers to implement alternatives to arrest for misdemeanor offenses in order to reduce jail populations.<sup>25</sup>

## Adaptations

In response to increased domestic violence concerns, measures were implemented that included proactive outreach, enhanced screening mechanisms, increased methods of reporting, expanded housing alternatives, and extended orders of protection. Despite the constraints victims faced, experts and advocates continued to encourage abuse victims to seek help.<sup>26</sup> Some victim advocates encouraged the use of hand signals during video calls to ask for help discreetly.<sup>27</sup>

### Agency Spotlight

In November 2020, the City of Houston allocated \$6.2 million in federal COVID-19 relief dollars to expand the availability of police department teams that helped respond to domestic abuse calls.

Source: D. McGuinness, "Houston to Spend \$6.2M in COVID-19 Funds to Expand HPD Domestic Abuse Teams," *Houston Chronicle*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Houston-to-spend-6-2M-in-COVID-19-funds-to-15714218.php>.

### Resource Spotlight

**The National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)** launched a Domestic Violence PSA encouraging those at risk to reach out to law enforcement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ilg6qFFHqQ5w>.

Police and other organizations issued public service announcements on social media to raise awareness of the issue and of the services and support available.<sup>28</sup> Police departments created dedicated units to proactively patrol hot spots of domestic violence,<sup>29</sup> and emergency call takers, dispatchers, and police officers were trained to look for certain risk factors predictive of lethality.<sup>30</sup> Law enforcement partnered with community organizations to connect victims with services virtually, pay for transportation,<sup>31</sup> or secure temporary housing when shelters closed.<sup>32</sup> Jurisdictions also adapted to ensure continuity of protective orders. Some states updated their legislation to allow protection orders to be requested and issued electronically. Interviews with judges and attorneys that previously would have occurred in person were offered over the phone.<sup>33</sup> The Salem (Oregon) Police Department leveraged an online victim notification network that

allowed both officers and victims to search for offenders and find out whether they were in custody. Through this system, users could register to receive notifications if the offender's custody status had changed, helping to allay victims' fears.<sup>34</sup> Hearings and interviews with judges were also conducted remotely with the aid of technology.<sup>35</sup>

## Human trafficking

### Challenges

Law enforcement tactics to detect and dismantle illegal sex and forced labor operations had to be altered during the pandemic. Financial constraints and other stressors of the pandemic may have placed mental and emotional strain on those already exposed to violence, and abusers leveraged this vulnerability to force their victims into labor or sex work. Human trafficking activities continued in illegal massage parlors, residential brothels, and motels. Social media was also commonly used to recruit victims,<sup>36</sup> and the opportunity for sexual exploitation online increased as more people stayed home. Children were especially vulnerable.

#### Increase in Trafficking Reports

Crisis cases reported to the Polaris Trafficking Hotline rose 40 percent after stay-at-home orders were enacted.

Source: "Human Trafficking During the COVID-19 Pandemic," Press release, June 10, 2020 (Washington, DC: The Polaris Project), <https://polarisproject.org/press-releases/human-trafficking-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

As reported by the National Human Trafficking Hotline, calls on labor trafficking specific to agriculture<sup>37</sup> increased during the pandemic,<sup>38</sup> while the *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020* by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that, based on historical trends, trafficking in persons is likely to increase—especially in countries experiencing rapid and significant losses in employment opportunities.<sup>39</sup>

Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) task force sites from the DOJ's ECM to Combat Human Trafficking program shared that among some task forces, proactive investigative efforts were suspended as a result of COVID-19–related restrictions and the reallocation of resources to COVID-19 priorities. Task forces continued to respond to high-priority and emergency trafficking situations.

### Adaptations

Police altered their tactics to shut down illegal sex operations. The Orange County (California) Police Department prioritized shutting down illegal sex operations as part of an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19.<sup>40</sup> In Anaheim, California, police investigators surveilled suspected brothels and observed foot traffic at the locations. Once they gathered enough evidence, they informed the city attorney and issued a violation to the homeowner or property manager. The Greater New Orleans Human Trafficking Task Force also investigated potential trafficking situations and informed

advocacy groups and community partners of their findings.<sup>41</sup> Officers across the country were instructed to pay close attention to young people reported missing and to prepare for a further increase in human trafficking once public health orders were lifted.<sup>42</sup>

Interagency collaboration was also important for continued victims' services. The Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking Prevention in Rockford, Illinois, continued regular contact with the domestic violence shelter and the city's Human Services Department to provide shelter to victims.<sup>43</sup> Agencies engaged in the International Association of Chiefs of Police's (IACP) Law Enforcement–Based Victim Services project worked with community partners to identify those who could still provide services via video conferencing or other technology to ensure continuity of legal representation, trauma therapy sessions, victim reparations, and more.

## Property crimes

### Challenges

As people spent more time at home and businesses reduced their hours or closed altogether, commercial property was left unprotected, leading to an increase in commercial burglaries in many places across the country including Denver;<sup>44</sup> Houston;<sup>45</sup> New York;<sup>46</sup> and Sacramento, California.<sup>47</sup> Car theft also became more common as people remaining at home often left their cars parked unattended outside. Vehicle larcenies increased 9 percent nationwide,<sup>48</sup> though this rate was much higher in places like New York and Los Angeles.<sup>49</sup> Houston and Harris County, Texas, like other parts of the country, saw thefts of catalytic converters triple because of the impact of COVID-19 on metal costs.<sup>50</sup> Some areas also experienced an increase in vandalism and graffiti as property was left unattended.

The economic hardships many faced during the pandemic, combined with fewer staff monitoring businesses, also increased the prevalence of shoplifting. Retailers and police departments reported that necessities like food and hygiene products were most targeted.<sup>51</sup> Relatedly, sheriff's deputies were tasked with enforcing a growing number of property evictions.<sup>52</sup>

### Adaptations

The increase in property crimes led agencies to adjust enforcement strategies. In Denver, Colorado, police commanders shifted more staff to night shifts and increased patrols in commercial areas.<sup>53</sup> In Baltimore, police were urged to remind residents to lock their cars, take their keys with them, and park in well-lit areas.<sup>54</sup> In Sacramento, police used video surveillance, prioritized response to business burglar alarms, and established an online business registry.<sup>55</sup> Retailers also increased their loss prevention efforts by hiring additional security guards or loss prevention experts and further training existing staff.<sup>56</sup>

## Hate and extremism

### Challenges

The pandemic has left many feeling angry and frustrated, and this anger has provided an opportunity for extremist groups to recruit, further fueled by propaganda framing public health orders as “medical martial law.”<sup>57</sup> The spread of hate-based ideology was of particular concern for youth, whose impressionability and increased idle time online may make them vulnerable to extremist messaging.<sup>58</sup>

The pandemic also exposed new potential targets to violence. The New York City Police Department (NYPD) listed hospitals as a major security concern for violent attacks, which would provide extremists a target opportunity to magnify their messaging.<sup>59</sup> Further, COVID-19 was itself used as a weapon. As intentional cases of individuals purported to have COVID-19 coughing, spitting, or intentionally spreading their germs to others came to light, prosecutors sought charges of terroristic threats.<sup>60</sup> The FBI warned of white supremacist groups encouraging sick members to spread the virus to targeted individuals including Jewish people, racial and ethnic minorities, and law enforcement.<sup>61</sup>

In some cases, extremists around the globe used the pandemic as an opportunity to amplify their beliefs, exploiting the pandemic as a sign from God.<sup>62</sup>

An increase in bias-motivated incidents of harassment, violence, and hate speech, especially targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, was also reported following the outbreak of COVID-19. In New York City, the NYPD’s Hate Crimes Task Force saw an increase in racist incidents against people of Asian descent between late March and mid-July 2020.<sup>63</sup> The increase in hate crimes was so prevalent that Asian American community members began arming themselves with cameras to record any incidents and weapons to protect themselves.<sup>64</sup> In response to this increasing issue, the FBI issued a letter to law enforcement agencies warning them about the rise in hate crimes targeting Asian Americans, whom racist extremists blamed for the spread of COVID-19.<sup>65</sup>

Other groups, especially immigrants and ethnic minorities, were targeted as well. Some extremist groups encouraged any member who contracted the virus to spread it, intentionally, to the groups they targeted.<sup>66</sup> Internet security agencies noticed an increase in racially motivated hate online as well,<sup>67</sup> which became more apparent as community members changed their lifestyles to stay home and spend more time online.

### Increase in Hate Crime Reports

On August 30, 2021, the FBI released the Hate Crime Statistics for 2020. Participating law enforcement agencies reported 7,554 single-bias incidents involving 10,528 victims, with race/ethnicity/ancestry being the largest single category of bias motivation (61.9 percent). Based on the 6.1 percent increase in hate crime reports from the previous year, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland issued a statement recognizing this as a priority:

“These statistics show a rise in hate crimes committed against Black and African Americans, already the group most often victimized. Notably, they show a rise in hate crimes committed against members of the Asian American Pacific Islander community. This also confirms what we have seen and heard through our work and from our partners.

These hate crimes and other bias-related incidents instill fear across entire communities and undermine the principles upon which our democracy stands. All people in this country should be able to live without fear of being attacked or harassed because of where they are from, what they look like, whom they love, or how they worship.

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Source: “Attorney General Garland Issues Statement on 2020 FBI Hate Crimes in the United States Statistics,” Press release, August 30, 2020 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-garland-issues-statement-2020-fbi-hate-crimes-united-states-statistics>.

Anecdotal stories supported the belief that hate crimes and hate incidents against Asian Americans were on the rise, even if many victims did not report out of fear. In Chesapeake, Virginia, owners of a local Chinese restaurant were targeted and harassed by a stranger who threw a bucket of dirty water on one owner and vandalized their car in addition to using a slew of hateful words. The restaurant did not report these incidents, which only came to the attention of police through a local reporter; a hate crimes investigation was opened in response.<sup>68</sup> In New Jersey, state police reported a 45 percent increase in reported hate crimes in 2020 from the preceding year, with more than 1,400 reports.<sup>69</sup>

### Adaptations

Government officials encouraged community members to report hate crimes to law enforcement. Police departments strengthened their collaborations with community groups to enhance this message, establishing partnerships with community leaders, advisory councils, and advocacy groups to ensure community members understood how to report hate crimes.

The mayor of New York City announced that many hate crimes go unreported and encouraged community members to report all hate crimes to the NYPD.<sup>70</sup> The New York Attorney General’s Office launched a hotline for community members to report hate crimes and incidents and worked



in conjunction with law enforcement to respond.<sup>71</sup> The governor of New York also directed the State Police Hate Crimes Task Force to help the NYPD investigate.<sup>72</sup> The NYPD quickly created its own task force, including translators; the task force investigated leads from social media, even when no formal complaint had been made.<sup>73</sup> The department also issued bystander intervention training in conjunction with community groups.<sup>74</sup>

### Agency Spotlight

The New York Attorney General's Office launched a hotline for community members to report hate crimes and incidents and worked in conjunction with law enforcement to respond.

Source: "AG James Launches Hotline to Combat Coronavirus Hate Crimes and Xenophobic Rhetoric," Press release, March 23, 2020 (Albany, NY: New York State Office of the Attorney General), <https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2020/ag-james-launches-hotline-combat-coronavirus-hate-crimes-and-xenophobic-rhetoric>.

A similar response was seen across the country. Police agencies leveraged social media to disseminate information on the recognition and reporting of hate crimes and hate incidents, and platforms for reporting hate crimes were made available in a variety of languages. The San Diego County, California, District Attorney's Office announced a new hotline and an online reporting form for the public to report suspected hate crimes.<sup>75</sup> The Los Angeles City Attorney held a community meeting online, encouraging people to

report hate and bias incidents.<sup>76</sup> In Seattle the police chief issued a public service announcement encouraging community members to report hate crimes.<sup>77</sup>

## Homicide and other violent crime

### Challenges

Varying trends in violent crime were noted during the pandemic as of the summer of 2020. Cities across the United States generally experienced an increase in homicides and gun violence compared to 2019, although mass shootings decreased.<sup>78</sup> In New Orleans for example, homicides increased 39 percent.<sup>79</sup> The FBI reported that murders increased nearly 15 percent nationwide in the first six months of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019.<sup>80</sup> Across the country, 51 cities of various sizes experienced an average 35 percent increase in murder from 2019 to 2020, and assaults with a gun increased by 10 percent in 21 cities studied.<sup>81</sup> Other sources reported a 30 percent increase in homicides across the United States.<sup>82</sup> In Detroit, homicides rose 68 percent, while nonfatal shootings rose 37 percent. At the same time, 14 percent of the Detroit Police Department had tested positive for COVID-19 and were forced to isolate themselves from others.<sup>83</sup>

The Los Angeles Police Department observed that its city's homeless population was especially vulnerable to homicide.<sup>84</sup> Disparity in communities of color is reflected in an analysis of 27 cities, which displayed that while violent crime decreased in majority-White communities during stay-at-home orders, rates of violence remained steady in majority-Black communities during that same time. Upon easing of social restrictions and stay-at-home orders, majority-White communities saw violent crime return to pre-pandemic levels; however, majority-Black neighborhoods continued to see significantly more violence compared to pre-pandemic levels of the previous three years.<sup>85</sup>

In Omaha, Nebraska, the police department speculated that the increase in gun violence was largely related to gangs, whose activity went unchecked when the department's gang prevention specialists were forced to curtail their outreach to minimize exposure to and spread of COVID-19.<sup>86</sup> Brooklyn, New York, and surrounding areas also attributed their increase in gun violence to gang activity.<sup>87</sup> Children also were more likely to find unsecured guns in their own homes, as they spent more time at home and grew bored and anxious.<sup>88</sup>

Some locations also saw increases in aggravated assault and violent crime. In Houston, aggravated assaults increased by 19 percent,<sup>89</sup> and Harris County, Texas, also reported an increase in aggravated robberies.<sup>90</sup> The Denver Police Department reported more violent incidents among its calls for service, compared to a three-year average.<sup>91</sup> Los Angeles saw an increase in aggravated assaults of only 2 percent, but a 5 percent decrease in violent crime overall.<sup>92</sup>

While each agency typically has access to records of types of crime in its own jurisdiction, fewer sources are available studying crime trends at the aggregate national level. Some studies that have attempted to do this are presented in table 1. This should not be considered a comprehensive review but is meant to provide a general overview of trends and variance in violent crime nationwide during the pandemic.

**Table 1. Studies of Pandemic Crime Trends**

Study	Scope of study	Time period measured	Change in homicide rates	Change in overall violent crime rates
Abrams / University of Pennsylvania*	Nationwide sample of 25 agencies	2015–May 2020	No significant change	Decrease ↓
National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice†	Nationwide sample of 38 agencies	January 2017–December 2020	Increase ↑	Increase ↑
FBI Yearly Crime Statistics ‡	More than 12,000 police agencies across the United States	January–December 2020 compared with January–December 2019	Increase ↑	Mixed
New York Times§	Nationwide sample of 10 agencies	2019–June 2020	Increase ↑	Decrease ↓
IACP/George Mason University COVID-19 Survey Wave 2**	Nationwide sample of more than 1,100 agencies	April 2020 compared with April 2019	Not available	Decrease ↓
Police Executive Research Forum Poll††	Nationwide sample of 30 agencies	March/April 2020 compared with March/April 2019	Mixed	Decrease ↓

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\*D. Abrams, *COVID and Crime: An Early Empirical Look*, University of Pennsylvania, Institute for Law & Economics Research Paper No. 20-49 (November 2, 2020), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3674032](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3674032).

†R. Rosenfeld, T. Abt, and E. Lopez, *Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities: 2020 Year-End Update* (Washington, DC: Council on Criminal Justice, January 2021), [https://build.neoninspire.com/counciloncj/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/2021/07/Year-End-Crime-Update\\_Designed.pdf](https://build.neoninspire.com/counciloncj/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/2021/07/Year-End-Crime-Update_Designed.pdf).

‡FBI National Press Office, “FBI Releases 2020 Crime Statistics,” Press release, September 27, 2021 (Washington, DC: FBI), <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2020-crime-statistics>.

§ T. Fuller, and T. Arango, “Police Pin a Rise in Murders on an Unusual Suspect: Covid,” *New York Times*, October 29, 2020, updated November 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/29/us/coronavirus-murders.html>.

\*\*C. Lum, C. Maupin, C., and M. Stoltz, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Law Enforcement Agencies (Wave 2),” Report, June 2025, 2020 (Washington, DC: IACP), [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/IACP\\_Covid\\_Impact\\_Wave2.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/IACP_Covid_Impact_Wave2.pdf).

†† PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), PERF Daily COVID-19 Report for May 12, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay12>.

## Adaptations

Police agencies adapted to the increase in violence by reallocating resources to areas where they were most needed. In Omaha, Nebraska, extra officers were assigned to the gang unit and specific precincts were identified for increased police patrol.<sup>93</sup> In New York City, officers previously assigned to enforce social distancing measures were reassigned to areas of gun violence.<sup>94</sup>

The Denver Police Department took a data-informed approach, studying crime trends from the 2008–2011 recession to anticipate potential trends, as well as identifying current crime hot spots, evaluating the effectiveness of various crime reduction strategies, and examining current trends in both types and incidences of crime. This allowed the department to concentrate its limited resources where they were needed most.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, in Richmond, California, the department formed an intelligence-led policing unit to focus on gun violence.<sup>96</sup>

## Cybercrime, fraud, and organized crime

### Challenges

An increased reliance on technology created more vulnerable channels for cybercrime. The increased use of online teleconferencing platforms made agencies and individuals more vulnerable to cyberattacks and disruption by malicious graphics or threatening messages. Cybercriminals operated phishing schemes, claiming to be from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or any other government agency to spread false information and gather data on individuals' identities and financial accounts.<sup>97</sup> Taking advantage of society's anxiety, scammers advertised fake personal protective equipment (PPE), fake COVID-19 tests, and false COVID-19 cures.<sup>98</sup> Other reports described individuals who reported their personal information was being held ransom by cybercriminals threatening to infect them with COVID-19 if they did not pay the demanded ransom fee.<sup>99</sup> The FBI also reported a number of fraudulent schemes advertising remote work that lured individuals to disclose financial information.<sup>100</sup>

### COVID-19–Related Scams

Reports estimate that coronavirus-related scams had cost Americans more than \$160 million by October 2020.

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Source: "COVID-19-Related Scams Have Cost Americans More Than \$160 Million," *Security*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/93762-covid-19-related-scams-have-cost-americans-more-than-160-million>; E. Fletcher, "Scams Starting on Social Media Proliferate in Early 2020," Blog post, October 21, 2020, Consumer Protection Data Spotlight –Federal Trade Commission, <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/blogs/data-spotlight/2020/10/scams-starting-social-media-proliferate-early-2020>.

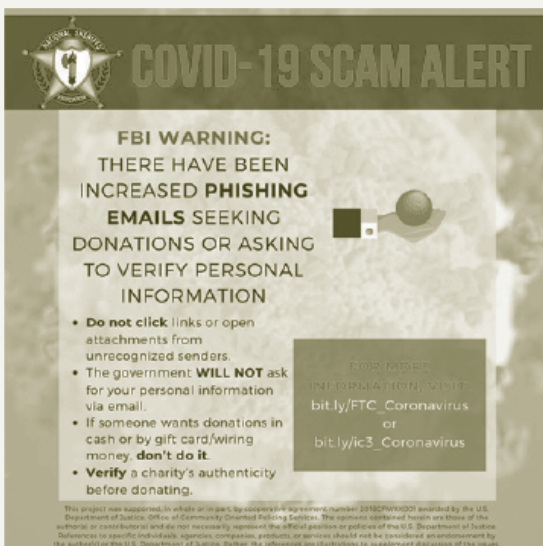
Although all individuals spending time online were vulnerable, some targets were at increased risk from cybercriminals. Elderly individuals who had limited experience with technology and greater anxiety over the risk of infection were especially vulnerable.<sup>101</sup> Hospitals, health organizations, and anyone responsible for responding to the pandemic were also targeted for cyberattacks, disrupting service to patients.<sup>102</sup> Children spent more time online, making them vulnerable to cyberbullying and online exploitation.<sup>103</sup> (See also the section on Child abuse, beginning on page 55.)

Schools quickly adapted to the pandemic by moving from in-person learning to online learning from home. When the new school year began in the fall of 2020, many school districts nationwide fell prey to cyberattacks that exposed sensitive data on students and staff or disrupted infrastructure, leading to canceled classes or delays in the start of the school year.<sup>104</sup> The FBI released warnings of “Zoom-bombing” in response to reports about virtual meetings disrupted with pornography, hate speech, and threatening images and messaging.<sup>105</sup> Not all fraud was committed online, however; retailers were accused of price-gouging essential goods like food, water, and cleaning supplies,<sup>106</sup> while others hoarded medical supplies.<sup>107</sup>

## Adaptations

### Resource Spotlight

The National Sheriffs’ Association (NSA) released a series of infographics for dissemination by local law enforcement addressing common scams: <https://www.sheriffs.org/coronavirus/scams/>.



Public service campaigns aimed to increase awareness and education and encouraged community members to be vigilant of cybercrime. The FBI released media packages explaining some of the more common online scams.<sup>108</sup> Agencies stressed the importance of using complex passwords and two-factor authentication, secure wi-fi networks, and updated cybersecurity software.<sup>109</sup> Some states also created new hotlines and websites specifically for consumers to report COVID-19–related scams and price gouging.<sup>110</sup>

Increased collaboration among local, state, and federal law enforcement officials also proved necessary to mitigate the impacts of fraud, catch perpetrators engaged in elaborate schemes electronically and across state

lines, and work to effectively prosecute those crimes. The U.S. Attorney General instructed attorneys to assign a prosecutor in each district to coordinate with federal, state, and local officials in collaborative fraud investigations.<sup>111</sup>

## Speeding

### Challenges

More people remaining in the home meant fewer people traveling on roadways. With fewer cars on the road, speeding was less inhibited, and traffic deaths per capita rose. The National Safety Council and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration both reported traffic deaths generally decreased during the pandemic, but they did not decrease by the same proportion as traffic volume had. While driving fell by about 26 percent in 2020 from 2019, traffic deaths decreased only about 3 percent. This indicates an increase in risky driving, which may include driving while impaired and driving without a seatbelt as well as excessive speeding. The traffic fatality rate rose to 1.42 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled in the March–June period of 2020; this was the highest rate since 2005. In contrast, the fatality rate for 2019 was 1.10 deaths per 100 million miles and was the lowest rate since 2014.<sup>112</sup> As roadwork crews were also taking advantage of reduced traffic to perform maintenance on roadways, the increase in speeding was especially concerning.<sup>113</sup>

This pattern was further corroborated by police departments across the country. In the first month of the pandemic, the California Highway Patrol experienced an 87 percent increase in citations to motorists driving more than 100 miles per hour (mph).<sup>114</sup> From mid-March through mid-August 2020, officers issued more than 15,000 tickets for speeds more than 100 mph; this was a 100 percent increase from the same period in 2019. The Iowa State Patrol recorded a similar increase of about 100 percent, compared to the four-year average, in tickets issued from January through August for speeds exceeding 100 mph. Tickets for speeds of 25 mph or more over the posted speed limit rose about 75 percent. Ohio state troopers saw a 61 percent increase from April 2019 to April 2020 in tickets for driving more than 100 mph. Although traffic had decreased 15 percent from February through July, the number of people driving more than 80 mph on Ohio roads increased by 30 percent. In Pennsylvania, tickets to drivers exceeding 100 mph increased 25 percent from June to August 2020.<sup>115</sup>

### Adaptations

As notable increases were seen in speeding or other reckless driving on the roadways, agencies increased targeted enforcement efforts and communication campaigns in response. In Sandy Springs, Georgia, traffic unit officers were stationed on the state highway and the interstate that

runs through that city, and unoccupied marked patrol cars were parked on the side of the road as a deterrent to speeding. The Colorado State Patrol monitored its data and deployed resources where they would likely have the greatest impact. The Vermont State Police joined the Crash Awareness and Reduction Effort campaign around the summer holidays, focusing on egregious highway violations.<sup>116</sup>

### Technology Spotlight

In Los Angeles, officials adjusted the timing of traffic lights and pedestrian signals to discourage speeding.

Source: L. Higgs, "Have Deserted N.J. Highways from Coronavirus Lockdowns Led to Extreme Speeding?" NJ.Com, May 27, 2020, <https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/05/have-deserted-nj-highways-from-coronavirus-lockdowns-led-to-extreme-speeding.html>.

Police agencies also increased traffic-related community outreach efforts. The Colorado State Patrol used strong public messaging and partnered with local law enforcement agencies across the state.<sup>117</sup> The California Highway Patrol focused on the "Move Over" law and reminded drivers that the law was still in effect, even with fewer cars on the roads.<sup>118</sup> In Flagler County, Florida, the sheriff's office released a public service announcement as part of its road rage safety campaign, reminding parents to act

appropriately while driving and to consider the example they set for any children in the vehicle.<sup>119</sup>

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# Theme 4. Enforcement of Public Health Orders

## Challenges

While minor criminal offenses and infractions were enforced less strictly during the pandemic than before it, some agencies were tasked with the added responsibility of monitoring public health orders related to physical distancing, wearing face coverings, and limiting large gatherings. The role of police in enforcing public health orders was often unclear and confusing for officers and deputies. As the pandemic progressed, these public health orders changed rapidly and sometimes even contradicted one other.<sup>1</sup> It is no surprise that police and sheriffs faced challenges in interpreting both the orders and their legal authority to enforce them.<sup>2</sup> In Texas, for example, those who repeatedly violated public health orders could be fined but not detained. To issue a citation, however, law enforcement would generally have to stop an individual—but as a stop could be misinterpreted as a detention, law enforcement were left essentially powerless at enforcing public health orders.<sup>3</sup>

The sheriffs' offices in Osceola County<sup>4</sup> and Broward County,<sup>5</sup> both in Florida, received complaints of parties or large gatherings (some with the stated intention of spreading COVID-19) and issued hundreds of citations to partygoers. But parties were not illegal, *per se*, and police instead arrested partygoers for possession of illegal drugs or weapons where they could.<sup>6</sup> In California, from June to July 2020, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department responded to nearly 700 complaints or disturbances related to COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> In New Jersey, the Alpine Police Department responded to a noise complaint and discovered a gathering of more than 300 people, in violation of public health orders.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the Lake County (Illinois) Sheriff's Office received so many complaints of violations of public health orders that deputies grew concerned the volume of complaints might be blocking response to more serious emergency calls.<sup>9</sup>

Enforcement occurred outside of parties as well. The Castle Rock (Colorado) Police Department had to take action against a restaurant that offered sit-down dining—a violation of the current public health order—on Mother's Day.<sup>10</sup> The Miami-Dade Police Department issued civil citations to those violating public health orders.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the Kaua'i (Hawaii) Police Department reported making several arrests for quarantine violations.<sup>12</sup> The New York City Police Department (NYPD) was tasked with enforcing a ban on congregating in large groups, which put the public

and responding officers at greater risk.<sup>13</sup> The police department of South Lake Tahoe, California, a resort town, had a similar experience: The police fined locals who had violated public health orders by renting their properties to the influx of visitors, attracting visitors who were likewise violating stay-at-home orders.<sup>14</sup>

In Tampa Bay, Florida, public health orders were largely unenforced,<sup>15</sup> and many police agencies across the United States refused to enforce such orders.<sup>16</sup> Some police agencies viewed the decision to wear face coverings as a personal choice beyond the scope of law enforcement duties and worried about the constitutionality of enforcing the orders.<sup>17</sup> Some cited confusion and inconsistency in the public health requirements.<sup>18</sup> Other agencies viewed their time and limited resources as better used on more serious criminal matters.<sup>19</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given the inconsistency in enforcement along with equally diverse public opinions on the matter, confrontations arose between police and segments of the community.<sup>20</sup> The situation was especially tumultuous when protests erupted across the nation when George Floyd was killed in police custody in May 2020, and law enforcement had to respond to these situations with the restrictions of the pandemic in mind.<sup>21</sup> Police agencies in large cities prepared for demonstration events,<sup>22</sup> but public health orders designed to prevent people from gathering in large groups conflicted with the right to assemble,<sup>23</sup> creating even more confusion about which rules to enforce.<sup>24</sup> And because face coverings block many nonverbal cues, effective communication between law enforcement and the community was more difficult than prior to the pandemic.<sup>25</sup>

## Adaptations

### Prepare in advance

To the extent possible, agencies prepared in advance for protests and mass gatherings. This preparation was accomplished by added emphasis on community-police engagement, transparent communication, and ensuring officers had adequate protective gear on hand.<sup>26</sup> While this sort of training and preparation has often been limited to certain specialized units, some agencies extended it to all patrol officers during this time.<sup>27</sup>

## Modify agency protocols

Some law enforcement agencies modified protocols in response to public health orders. In California, for example, a new call type designation was created for shelter-in-place violations.<sup>28</sup> The Carthage (Texas) Police Department used criminal trespassing laws to enforce mandates to wear masks.<sup>29</sup> Florida took a statewide approach to concerns after a spike in cases in June 2020, banning alcohol in Florida bars.<sup>30</sup> Some Florida agencies, such as the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, modified their approach and began visiting bars and enforcing the new ban through warnings, notices, and potential arrests.<sup>31</sup>

## Collaborate with other authorities

Given inconsistent and rapidly changing public health orders, interagency communication and collaboration was especially important. As one example, several Florida agencies collaborated to establish a common understanding of public health orders.<sup>32</sup> The Oregon State Police similarly cooperated with local police departments to interpret and enforce public health orders.<sup>33</sup>

Collaboration with nonpolice government agencies was also common. Some agencies relied on legal advisors or public health experts to interpret public health orders and considered it the police's duty to enforce them.<sup>34</sup> In California, task forces including representatives from the California Highway Patrol, the state's Division of Occupational Safety and Health, the Department of Consumer Affairs, the Department of Food and Agriculture, the Labor Commissioner's Office, and the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development worked together to enforce public health orders.<sup>35</sup> On a local level, the mayor of the city of Calabasas agreed to work cooperatively with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department,<sup>36</sup> and the San Diego County Sheriff's Department worked with the county's code compliance teams to enforce compliance with public health orders.<sup>37</sup>

Members of the New Jersey Attorney General's Office were assigned to the New Jersey State Police Command Center,<sup>38</sup> while the Governor's Office set up a hotline that alerted local police and sheriffs of calls about community members not complying with public health guidelines.<sup>39</sup> In New York City, the NYPD coordinated with the City Transit Authority to enforce physical distancing and wearing of face coverings on public transportation.<sup>40</sup> On and around college campuses, university police departments coordinated with other agencies within the university system and with local police departments in their surrounding jurisdiction.<sup>41</sup> In Nantucket, Massachusetts, police worked collaboratively with community leaders to gain the cooperation of undocumented immigrants fearful of the police.<sup>42</sup>

In some cases, the duty to enforce public health orders was delegated entirely to nonpolice agencies. In Savannah, Georgia, city employees were deputized and authorized to issue citations to anyone not wearing a face covering as mandated, alleviating the burden on the police.<sup>43</sup> Within the Palm Beach County (Florida) Schools Police Department, police did not enforce public health orders. Rather, these responsibilities were carried out by administrative staff and risk management personnel.<sup>44</sup> At Virginia airports serving the Washington, D.C., region, the Department of Health enforced public health orders, so the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority did not.<sup>45</sup>

### Technology Spotlight

The Honolulu (Hawaii) Police Department created separate hotlines for violations of public health orders and COVID-19–related complaints, while the Lake County (Illinois) Sheriff’s Office created a website for people to report complaints of possible public health order violations, thereby opening availability on the county’s emergency lines.

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### Encourage voluntary compliance

Most agencies opted for an educational approach rather than one of punitive enforcement. In Washington, D.C., for example, the mayor stressed education and prevention over enforcement.<sup>46</sup> The Denver Police Department also encouraged its officers to empathize with noncompliant community members to reach a shared understanding; instead of giving an imperative order, officers were encouraged to offer explanation and rationale for why the restrictions were being enforced.<sup>47</sup> Florida agencies reported similar approaches, despite an official mandate for the public to wear face coverings.<sup>48</sup>

In New York City, police encouraged the public to maintain physical distance from one another and to wear masks, although these suggestions were generally not enforced. When someone was not wearing a mask, police would give them one; the NYPD Transit Authority distributed about 50,000 masks this way.<sup>49</sup> Transit authorities similarly took a proactive, educational approach to enforcing public health orders. By August 2020, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Police Department had distributed more than 7,000 masks but issued only two summonses and one arrest.<sup>50</sup>

When agencies received calls for service related to public health violations, many gave warnings before taking enforcement action.<sup>51</sup> When officers from the Castle Rock (Colorado) Police Department were notified of a restaurant violating public health orders, their initial response was to offer the restaurant information on the ordinance in place. When the restaurant still failed to comply, officers referred the case to the state’s public health department, who served a closure order and suspended the establishment’s license.<sup>52</sup>



Still others sought a middle ground. The Warren County (Ohio) Sheriff's Department, for example, agreed to serve court papers related to COVID-19 restrictions but refused to file charges for violations.<sup>53</sup> The Montgomery County (Texas) Sheriff's Office would intervene at local businesses to manage noncompliant customers only upon request from the business owner.<sup>54</sup>

Many agencies also engaged in proactive media campaigns through television, social media,<sup>55</sup> press conferences,<sup>56</sup> signs in public areas, and other public announcements.<sup>57</sup> The NYPD drove through parks playing recorded reminders of public health orders.<sup>58</sup> They spread the messages in person, too; in a single weekend in May 2020, the NYPD deployed 1,000 officers to encourage compliance with public health orders.<sup>59</sup> The New Orleans Police Department provided its officers a script to use to break up large groups, as this was not a duty the police had previously had to enforce.<sup>60</sup>

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# Theme 5. Officer Safety and Wellness

## Challenges

### Officer exposure

The COVID-19 pandemic raised the general public's level of stress and anxiety concerning exposure to illness and also its awareness of the importance of public health measures. While the country underwent changes in day-to-day activities—such as the implementation of remote work, delivery services, and capacity limits—people also learned about the importance of social and physical distancing, the use of masks, and thorough handwashing. These important measures were implemented to reduce exposure and sickness, but not all professions and activities could adapt easily to this new normal. Law enforcement duties sometimes conflicted with public health practices, especially because law enforcement personnel have a duty to respond to all calls for service they receive. Every call that requires interaction between an officer and a community member increases the risk of exposure for both parties. Officers and deputies may have to come into close contact while assisting with a crash investigation, interviewing a victim, assisting during an opioid overdose,<sup>1</sup> arresting a suspect, or fulfilling their duties in correctional and detention settings. Furthermore, in some cases, law enforcement personnel may not be able to wear full personal protective equipment (PPE), because PPE could limit access to duty belts and impede essential functions.

According to the National Policing Institute (NPI) *COVID-19 Law Enforcement Impact Dashboard*, as of March 2021, 3.5 percent of law enforcement personnel at 614 reporting agencies had been exposed to COVID-19 through their work.<sup>2</sup> See figure 4 for the 10 states with the most law enforcement exposure.<sup>3</sup>

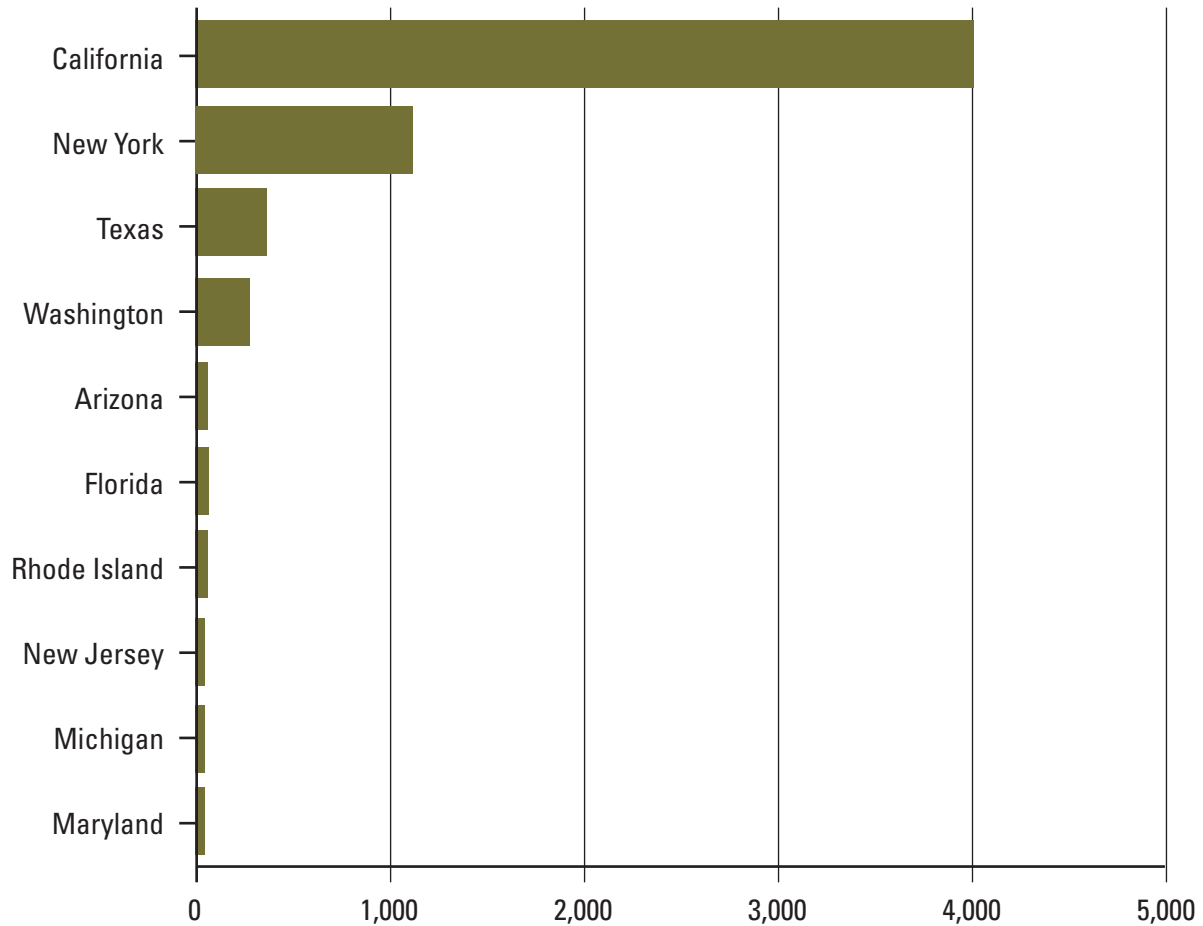
**Figure 4. COVID-19 law enforcement impact dashboard exposure by state****Exposure by state**

Image credit: National Policing Institute, "Coronavirus (COVID-19): Resources for Law Enforcement," accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.policefoundation.org/covid-19/#Dashboard>.

Because of the nature of the work in correctional institutions and detention centers, correctional officers, deputies, and other personnel come into close contact with incarcerated individuals on a regular basis; this close contact makes it difficult to physically distance themselves and follow certain public health parameters. Research by the Major County Sheriffs of America and the National Commission on Correctional Health Care found that correctional staff are at high risk for contracting COVID-19, higher even than incarcerated individuals.<sup>4</sup> Transit officers had similar challenges because their work in confined spaces puts them at greater risk of exposure.<sup>5</sup>

## Resource Spotlight

Law enforcement responding to COVID-19–related deaths were at increased risk of exposure to the virus. As a direct result of this added risk, CRI-TAC released the guidance document *Considerations for Law Enforcement Encountering COVID-19–Related Deaths* to assist law enforcement agencies in preparing for these types of encounters: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0908>.

As concerns of COVID-19 continue to spread throughout local communities, law enforcement agencies should prepare officers for the unfortunate situation of encountering a COVID-19–related unattended death. Where feasible, officers should not be responsible for touching or removal of a dead body where COVID-19 is suspected. Rather, EMS personnel, funeral directors, and medical examiners should be involved. The following considerations are specific to COVID-19 deaths where law enforcement is responding without the assistance of a medical examiner.

COORDINATE	PROTECT
<p>Law enforcement agencies should proactively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate protocols about exposure risk to personnel.</li> <li>Implement "can't take questions for calls for service related to deaths" for COVID-19 to determine risk for officers in advance.</li> <li>Ensure proper infectious disease reporting. Communicate the risks of exposure with public health departments, hospitals, coroners, medical examiners, funeral directors, and anyone else involved in transportation of a deceased infected individual to minimize risk of exposure.</li> <li>Communicate the circumstances of the death to those involved in the transportation of a deceased infected individual to allow for appropriate allocation of resources (e.g., PPE, staff support, etc.).</li> </ul>	<p>Law enforcement agencies should be sure to provide training to all personnel on correct application and removal of PPE as well as proper hand-washing techniques. Follow your agency policy or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance. Officers who encounter or come into contact with a deceased individual suspected of having COVID-19 should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid disturbing the body. Based on what is now believed, the virus is transmitted through the air or when touching contaminated surfaces. Because the body is not producing an exchange or actively excreting, there need to use some PPE items may be less urgent. However, risk remains until the last gust of air has been expelled from the body (which may be post-mortem).</li> <li>Officers also, if available, use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if available, in accordance with agency policy. PPE might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respirator (such as an N-95 or higher) or other appropriate mask</li> <li>Non-sterile gloves</li> <li>Protective glasses or goggles</li> <li>Impermeable suit or gown</li> <li>Boots or shoe covers</li> </ul> </li> <li>Use caution when removing PPE and follow standard operating procedures, or PPE removal. See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance.</li> <li>Use extra precautions when entering homes or businesses.</li> <li>For more guidance in this area, visit <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0924-law-enforcement-officer-response-to-covid-19">https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0924-law-enforcement-officer-response-to-covid-19</a>.</li> </ul>

Officer or deputies exposed to COVID-19 risked not only infecting others in their agencies<sup>6</sup> and their own families but also transmitting the infection to community members during another call.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, law enforcement and first responders have sometimes hesitated to respond to nonemergency 911 calls to limit exposure to COVID-19.<sup>8</sup>

Some agencies have even seen perpetrators taking advantage of COVID-19 to assault law enforcement by biting, spitting, or coughing on officers and deputies.<sup>9</sup>

## PPE accessibility

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided guidance that law enforcement should wear, at a minimum, a single pair of disposable gloves, disposable isolation gown or single-use/disposable coveralls, any National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health–approved particulate respirator, and eye protection where possible.<sup>10</sup> The CDC also provided recommendations for optimizing supplies or alternatives when PPE is not available.<sup>11</sup>

This guidance was vital, especially early in the pandemic when law enforcement agencies had challenges obtaining PPE,<sup>12</sup> such as in the Jefferson County (Colorado) Sheriff's Office,<sup>13</sup> the Kansas City (Missouri) Police Department,<sup>14</sup> and the Walworth County (Wisconsin) Sheriff's Office. More than a year into the pandemic, only 63 percent of law enforcement agencies had sufficient PPE, with particulate respirators reported to the NPI Dashboard as the most needed PPE item.<sup>15</sup> Between March and July 2020, 38 percent of agencies reported having insufficient PPE, with small and mid-size agencies reporting the highest need for PPE.<sup>16</sup>

While some agencies struggled to obtain and maintain sufficient PPE levels, other agencies had available PPE, but personnel were not mandated to wear it<sup>17</sup> and in some cases were even banned from wearing masks.<sup>18</sup>

## Balancing individual privacy with officer and public safety

Another challenge to officer safety and wellness during the pandemic has been law enforcement personnel's inability to access information about households or individuals in their jurisdiction with positive COVID-19 tests. Officers and deputies equipped with this information have been better able to prepare to respond properly to calls for service while maintaining officer safety.

Despite guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,<sup>19</sup> however, many state and local governments cited Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and privacy concerns as barriers to sharing this information. Some law enforcement agencies were told that sharing this information would increase the competition for PPE,<sup>20</sup> while others

stated that all law enforcement should be treating everyone as a potential exposure risk.<sup>21</sup> Adding to the complexity of this issue were concerns of profiling in minority communities by those already mistrustful that law enforcement might forward the information to immigration officials.<sup>22</sup>

Obtaining access to this information required coordination with local health departments and also at times involved courts,<sup>23</sup> public hearings, public testimony,<sup>24</sup> and state executive orders and mandates.<sup>25</sup> It became even more difficult when a state executive order was revoked, as seen in Tennessee;<sup>26</sup> expired, as in Oklahoma,<sup>27</sup> or was overruled by the state Supreme Court, as in Wisconsin.<sup>28</sup> Without good engagement with the local public health departments, law enforcement agencies struggled to receive the necessary information.<sup>29</sup>

### Resource Spotlight

To break down the important information that agencies needed to know about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the proper and legal disclosure to law enforcement of protected health information, CRI-TAC released the guidance document *HIPAA and Law Enforcement: COVID-19 Pandemic Considerations*: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0907>.

**HIPAA Considerations for Law Enforcement during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Introduction**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, information regarding the proper and legal disclosure to law enforcement of protected health information (PHI) of individuals confirmed or suspected of having COVID-19 has been a topic of concern.

**The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule does allow healthcare providers and/or other associated healthcare entities to disclose an individual's PHI to law enforcement as it relates to COVID-19 infection, exposure, or any other reasonably pertinent information without a signed HIPAA Authorization by the individual!**

Disclosure of COVID-19 related PHI to law enforcement is intended to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 as well as protect the health and safety of first responders as they carry out their essential duties during the pandemic.

**Understanding the HIPAA Privacy Rule**

The HIPAA Privacy Rule, originated in 1996, gives privacy protections to individuals relating to any health information in the possession of their health care providers and/or other associated health care entities (HIPAA-covered entities). HIPAA provides these HIPAA-covered entities with rules on when, and with whom, a person's PHI can or cannot be shared, affording the individual a they serve more rights regarding the distribution of their health information.

Law enforcement agencies are not HIPAA-covered entities and are not subjected to the privacy rules set forth in the HIPAA law nor privy to PHI. There may be exceptions such as when law enforcement agencies operate their own, independent emergency medical services, which would be considered HIPAA-covered agencies.

There are instances where HIPAA-covered agencies can disclose PHI to law enforcement. The most evident example is when a person signs a HIPAA authorization form giving permission to disclose PHI to law enforcement. However, PHI can be disclosed to law enforcement by HIPAA-covered entities in situations where authorization was not signed. These situations include when:

- There is a good faith belief of an imminent threat to the health or safety of an individual or the public. This exception applies heavily in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Criminal activity is suspected or involved, such as when:
  - A crime occurring on the premises of a HIPAA-covered entity
  - Patient death
  - Off-site medical emergencies
  - Specific crime-related injuries such as gunshot or stab wounds
  - Identifying or locating a suspect, fugitive, material witness or missing person
  - Child abuse or neglect
- A legal requirement such as a warrant, a subpoena or summons has been served.
- A law enforcement official makes an administrative request to a HIPAA-covered entity, detailing reasons for the requested information.

**A Discussion: PHI Disclosure to Law Enforcement in the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Specific examples where HIPAA-covered entities may share COVID-19 related PHI with law enforcement are when:

- Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are responding to an incident at a facility with law enforcement officers and are aware of a situation where close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 will occur?
- HIPAA-covered entities have a good faith belief that disclosing the relevant PHI will minimize or stop a threat of imminent exposure of COVID-19 to any officers or other personnel?
- Law enforcement officials have lawful custody of an individual or inmate and are requesting the COVID-19 related PHI to maintain the health and safety of that individual and other individuals in custody, correctional staff or others in law enforcement.\*



## Priority testing and medical clearances for public safety personnel

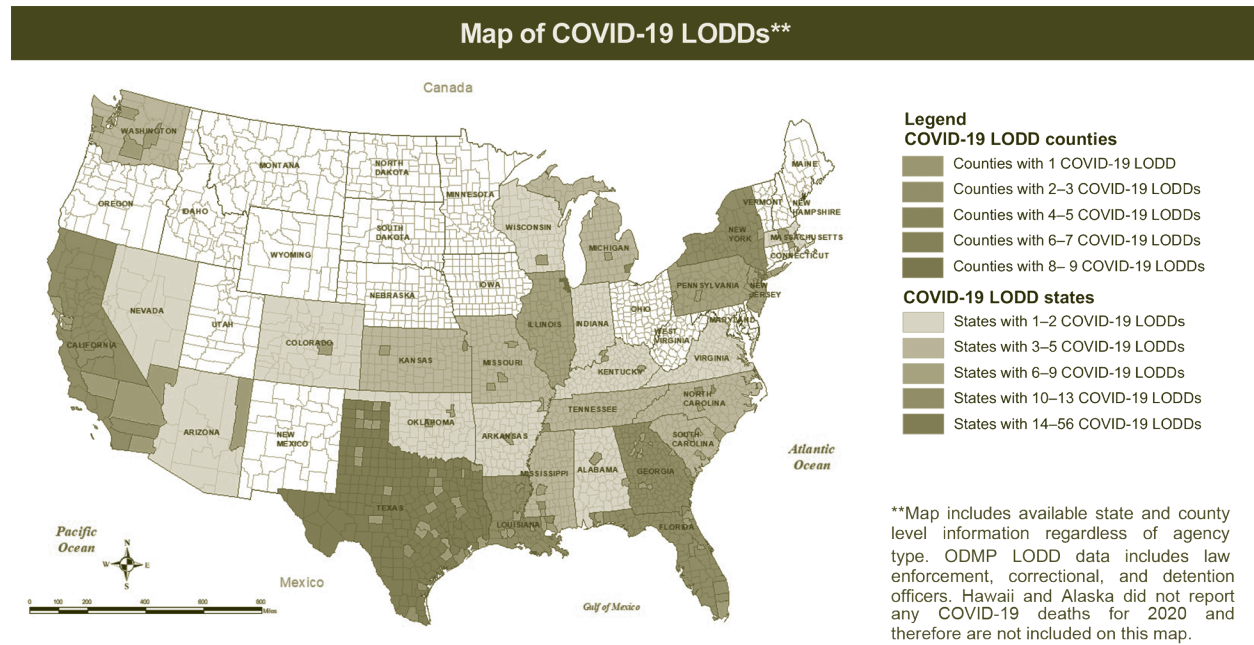
As officers and deputies were potentially exposed to COVID-19 during their day-to-day activities, any potential exposure necessitated safety protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Isolating and quarantining, however, led to the law enforcement staffing shortages experienced in a range of agencies, such as the Seattle Police Department.<sup>30</sup> The staffing shortages were exponentially worse at smaller agencies such as the Pamlico County (North Carolina) Sheriff's Office, where the entire agency had to shut down because of exposure.<sup>31</sup> To ensure officer and public safety, law enforcement agencies attempted to obtain priority COVID-19 testing to allow personnel to return to work as quickly as possible and ensure continuity of operations.

At the same time, the return of law enforcement officers from quarantine was delayed by insufficient medical personnel. The New York City Police Department (NYPD) required officers to be fully examined by doctors before returning to duty, but the influx of officers needing to be examined was more than doctors were able to handle, prolonging the staffing shortages.<sup>32</sup>

Challenges in testing and access to medical personnel were felt even more in correctional settings and jails. The Dallas County (Texas) Sheriff's Office did not have access to adequate testing, which joined with overcrowding, lack of PPE, lack of nurses, and other issues to create a risky environment that led to 45 incarcerated individuals and 27 staff members with active cases and another 474 incarcerated individuals quarantined without active cases by late August 2020.<sup>33</sup>

## Line of duty deaths

The NPI, in partnership with CRI-TAC, analyzed COVID-19 line-of-duty death (LODD) data from the Officer Down Memorial Page (ODMP), which is based on public submissions evaluated for inclusion in the database.<sup>34</sup> According to this analysis, 221 law enforcement officers, deputies, and other personnel died from March through December 2020, which represents 68 percent or more of all LODDs in 29 states, territories, and the District of Columbia.<sup>35</sup> April represented the deadliest month, accounting for 18 percent of the deaths.<sup>36</sup> COVID-19 was the greatest cause of LODDs in 2020.<sup>37</sup> According to the NLEOMF, 301 law enforcement died in 2021 from contracting COVID-19 in the line of duty.<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 5. COVID-19 line-of-duty deaths March – December 2020**

Wisconsin, Rhode Island, Guam, and the District of Columbia were tied with the highest percentage of total COVID-19 LODDs, followed by New Jersey, Illinois, and federal law enforcement agencies (see figure 5). By May 2020, dozens of police officers, public health workers, transit workers, and paramedics had died of COVID-19 in New York state.<sup>39</sup>

### **Stress and mental health and wellness**

The stresses of the pandemic led to increased stress and anxiety for law enforcement personnel and their families. Staffing shortages led to longer shifts and cancelation of leave<sup>40</sup> as well as reassignments and changes in routine.<sup>41</sup> On top of this, many smaller agencies are exempt from Fair Labor Standards Act regulations governing scheduling and overtime and enforce schedules that leave officers and deputies vulnerable to exhaustion, illness, and stress.<sup>42</sup>

Law enforcement personnel generally have heightened alertness and situational awareness, but under the added pressures of new protective measures and risks, some in law enforcement struggled to cope with the stress and mental exhaustion.<sup>43</sup> One agency shared feedback that officers became triggered by terms such as “URGENT” in email subject lines and fell into cognitive traps that prevented them from seeing productive coping mechanisms.

Since the start of the pandemic, the law enforcement profession has been seeing personnel more prone to negative bias,<sup>44</sup> burnout,<sup>45</sup> and substance abuse, with an increase in mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.<sup>46</sup> Some jurisdictions such as Hennepin County, Minnesota, saw a significant increase in requests for wellness services;<sup>47</sup> others are preparing for an influx of personnel facing post-traumatic stress disorder following the pandemic, similar to the anticipation of the response to a mass casualty event.<sup>48</sup> Just as Hurricane Katrina and the September 11th attacks did, COVID-19 is expected to cause increased needs for mental health services among first responders because of both professional and personal stressors.<sup>49</sup> Such stressors include on-the-job safety and security, child care needs, isolation or loneliness, and lack of access to traditional exercise options such as gyms.<sup>50</sup>

Both Cop2Cop, at Rutgers University in New Jersey, and Copline, based in Freehold, New Jersey, indicated increases in users seeking their services: Cop2Cop reported 2,718 more calls and other messages during the first eight months of 2020 than in the same period in 2019, while Copline logged a 74 percent increase in calls.<sup>51</sup>

The discussion of stress and mental health and wellness for law enforcement needs to include the impact on families, especially the vicious cycle of officers and deputies bringing their work frustrations home with them and their family stress to the agency.<sup>52</sup> Because of these issues, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) saw an increase in officers and their spouses seeking couples counseling.<sup>53</sup>

Family issues impact coworkers more directly, as well. The LAPD was jarred when a detective who was sick with COVID-19 lost his wife to the virus in April 2020, as at that point many within the department still did not believe they would be affected by COVID-19.<sup>54</sup>

### Resource Spotlight

CRI-TAC released several resources addressing stress and mental health and wellness:

- Law Enforcement and COVID-19, a 28-page supplement to the May 2020 *Police Chief* magazine: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0905>
- Officer Wellness and Resiliency during the COVID-19 Pandemic: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0910>

## Adaptations

### Policy and protocols

As law enforcement agencies responded to the new normal of the pandemic, many implemented new guidelines and protocols and reevaluated, revised, and adjusted policies and procedures for supporting safety and wellness. For example, the Durham (North Carolina) Police Department human resources team established officer sickness protocols and served as the intermediary between employees and the hospital so that command staff did not need to get involved in decisions impacting employees' health or return to the job. Agencies also developed protocols to ensure decontamination of patrol vehicles,<sup>55</sup> the use of N95 masks,<sup>56</sup> and notifications of positive cases via the computer-aided dispatch CAD system<sup>57</sup>—or, in the case of Miami, by creating a heat map to flag positive cases via dispatch.<sup>58</sup> Revisions to policing operations included reducing the capacity of CompStat meetings;<sup>59</sup> moving to outdoor or virtual meetings, briefings, and roll calls;<sup>60</sup> installing glass panels to separate law enforcement from community members;<sup>61</sup> shifting

#### Agency Spotlight

The Los Angeles (California) Police Department developed a Rest and Recovery area at the Academy. Officers tired from a long shift, and who didn't want to go home and potentially expose their family members to COVID-19, had a quiet space to eat, shower, get a haircut, and sleep.

Source: Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), PERF Daily COVID-19 Report for April 23, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril23>.

to one-officer patrols;<sup>62</sup> and separating work teams and shifts.<sup>63</sup> (See Theme 1. Administration and Operations beginning on page 11 for further discussion.)

State, local, and agency mandates around masks and other PPE varied widely:<sup>64</sup> Some agencies provided supplies to their personnel,<sup>65</sup> while other agencies allowed personnel to wear cloth masks during supply shortages. Several transit agencies built decontamination rooms to allow officers to protect themselves and their loved ones by decontaminating themselves at the end of their shift before returning home.<sup>66</sup>

Other agencies used time-share rooms<sup>67</sup> or

quarantine centers just for law enforcement,<sup>68</sup> entered into partnerships with local hotels, or used Airbnb to allow officers and deputies to stay separated from their loved ones, minimizing the risk of exposing them to COVID-19.<sup>69</sup>

Agencies like the NYPD created internal contact tracing teams to ensure that they were able to identify the source of exposures and any others who might have been exposed.<sup>70</sup> To ensure they were receiving customized assistance, the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association hired an infectious disease doctor to consult with the sheriffs and to assist with liaising with the state Department of Public Health.<sup>71</sup>

### The NLEOMF COVID-19 Task Force

In response to a surge in COVID-19–related line of duty deaths, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) formed a COVID-19 task force to promote officer safety and wellness. The task force provided law enforcement officers with resources and data related to the pandemic and with guidance on researching and vetting COVID-19–related law enforcement deaths. Task force members included law enforcement professionals, health experts, and NLEOMF staff researchers.

Source: S. Ziegler, “NLEOMF forms COVID-19 task force for officer safety, wellness,” *Police 1*, November 13, 2020, <https://www.police1.com/coronavirus-covid-19/articles/nleomf-forms-covid-19-task-force-for-officer-safety-wellness-0d9tzGUFqY8e9AYH/>, accessed March 3, 2021.

Agencies developed officer health screening protocols to monitor the health of their employees without being unnecessarily invasive or violating employees’ privacy. Some agencies developed self-screening tools,<sup>72</sup> while others like those in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, screened all employees and provided them with wristbands for tracking purposes.<sup>73</sup>

Some agencies reevaluated leave policies and decided not to charge employees for leave time, while others prevented personnel from taking leave but extended the leave bank. The Phoenix Police Department decided to give each employee up to 80 hours of leave if they contracted COVID-19.<sup>74</sup>

In June 2020, Police1 deployed the survey *COVID-19’s Impact on Law Enforcement Operations* to more than 200 Illinois agencies. Ninety-four percent of respondents said new safety measures had been deployed at their agencies since the start of the pandemic, including distribution of PPE, new protocols for interacting with the public, social distancing, thorough hand washing, use of hand sanitizer, and sanitizing of squad cars and stations.<sup>75</sup>

These efforts seemed to work for some law enforcement agencies in Wisconsin, such as the Appleton, Green Bay, and Janesville Police Departments, which did not see increases in cases among their employees during a resurgent spike in the state in the fall of 2020.<sup>76</sup> Agency executives were diligent with PPE, physical distancing among staff, and other public health precautions.<sup>77</sup>

### Resource Spotlight

CRI-TAC released the guidance document *Law Enforcement Officer Exposure to COVID-19* to assist law enforcement agencies in the event of personnel’s exposure to COVID-19: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-W0906>.

### Technology Spotlight

The New Jersey State Police (NJSP) created a tool to measure PPE use. They also analyzed staffing levels, population density, resource requests, CDC guidelines, and other factors to develop a reliable metric to measure PPE burn rate among their troopers and personnel. The NJSP planned to expand the tool to other public safety professionals including fire, emergency management services (EMS), and hospital workers throughout the state.

Source: The Brookings Institution, "Policing in the Era of COVID-19," webinar, May 11, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/webinar-policing-in-the-era-of-covid-19/>.

### Collaboration

Successful community-police engagement involves strong partnerships, so in times of crisis, collaboration is vital. To meet the PPE shortage, agencies partnered with community groups to obtain necessary supplies,<sup>78</sup> labor unions stepped up to distribute resources,<sup>79</sup> and national associations like the National Sheriffs' Association partnered with private and nonprofit organizations to provide free PPE resources.<sup>80</sup>

Through innovative procedures and local collaborations, some agencies had success implementing rapid COVID-19 testing for public safety personnel. The Seattle Police Department collaborated with emergency management services (EMS) agencies to create protocols for testing and with a testing lab to have swabs sent directly to the lab for rapid test results.<sup>81</sup> The NYPD trained 20 officers as nurses to assist in the medical evaluations and check-ins of officers returning to work or out sick.<sup>82</sup>

The Detroit Police Department used a 15-minute diagnostic test to allow more than 700 quarantined employees to return to work,<sup>83</sup> while the Jefferson County (Colorado) Sheriff's Office established drive-through clinics for their staff and other public safety officials<sup>84</sup> and the Arlington County (Virginia) Police Department acquired a rapid testing machine.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the Richland County (South Carolina) Sheriff's Department was

selected by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control to be the pilot agency for a COVID-19 testing program in which first responders were tested quickly on a large scale with little lead time.<sup>86</sup>

### Agency Spotlight

Through the Wisconsin Sheriffs & Deputy Sheriffs Association Sheriffs Helping Sheriffs program, when a sheriff has personnel- or equipment-related needs, other sheriffs will assist. The program has worked with a distillery for sanitation supplies and found a distributor for gowns and masks.

Source: National Sheriffs' Association, Weekly State Executive Conference Call, Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association status report, May 20, 2020.

Collaborations also helped agencies meet public safety goals. The Clearwater (Florida) Police Department partnered with Tampa Bay Psychology Associates to assist officers with building healthy coping mechanisms, communication, and interactions.<sup>87</sup>

Agencies also formed partnerships to assist in vaccine development and release. The Denver Police Department collaborated with the union and local hospital officials to provide 144 volunteers to participate in the Moderna vaccine trial.<sup>88</sup> Idaho's top epidemiologist worked to ensure that the vaccine would be prioritized for first responders in the state, alongside health care workers.<sup>89</sup>

### **Resources on Vaccination**

A coronavirus vaccine became available in the United States in December 2020, issued under Emergency Use Authorization, with full approval from the Food and Drug Administration following in August 2021. Though many were relieved at the availability of this preventative mechanism, others were skeptical of the newly developed vaccine and concerned about the potential for unknown long-term side effects, and this hesitancy was even greater among law enforcement than among the general public.

Resources developed to address law enforcement questions and concerns on vaccination include the following:

The Bureau of Justice Assistance COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit for the Law Enforcement Community, available at <https://www.valorforblue.org/Clearinghouse/1469/COVID-19-Vaccine-Toolkit-for-the-Law-Enforcement-Community>. The toolkit included educational fact sheets about the COVID-19 vaccine as well as templates and examples that could be used to communicate within the agency and with the public.

The Fraternal Order of Police Question-and-Answer Guide on COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates in Public-Sector Employment, available at <https://national.fop.net/covidvaccineqa>.

The IACP Mandating COVID-19 Vaccinations for U.S. Law Enforcement Personnel, available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/mandating-covid-19-vaccinations-for-us-law-enforcement-personnel>.

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## Agency Spotlight

The Orange County (Florida) Sheriff's Office used lessons learned from the rate of PTSD experienced by first responders in the aftermath of the Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting. In the wake of that event, Sheriff John W. Mina developed the It's Okay Not to Be Okay campaign to discuss his own struggles with PTSD. The agency adapted that program to develop a similar campaign for pandemic-related trauma.

The Tempe (Arizona) Police Department encouraged employees to use the yoga instructors available to all staff, while the Huntington (West Virginia) Police and Fire Departments deployed the Compass project, which includes online training videos and workouts that can be used by staff and their families. Several agencies also used their peer support teams to support personnel throughout the pandemic, especially employees quarantined at home.

Sources: National Commission on Correctional Healthcare, COVID-19 Weekly Roundtable for Law Enforcement and Correctional Health Care, webinar series, April 24, 2020, <https://www.ncchc.org/blog/covid-19-weekly-roundtable-for-law-enforcement-correctional-health-care-webinar>; Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), PERF Daily COVID-19 Report for April 23, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril23>; L. Willing, "Compass Project Helps First Responders Focus on Wellness," *Police1*, July 13, 2020, <https://www.police1.com/health-wellness/articles/compass-project-helps-first-responders-focus-on-wellness-0zVufska0migR1TZ/>.

## Updating legislation and expanding coverage of death benefits and workers' compensation

The surviving family members of any law enforcement officer or deputy who dies in the line of duty are eligible for death benefits through the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program.<sup>90</sup> Using this program was initially difficult with respect to LODDs from COVID-19, as the family had to prove the exposure occurred directly in the line of duty to qualify for benefits. Local and national unions worked to ensure that deaths of law enforcement officers and deputies from COVID-19 were treated as LODDs so that the families were able to obtain benefits to help ensure their financial security.<sup>91</sup> With the passing of Public Law 116-157, the Safeguarding America's First Responders Act, the PSOB program assumed "a general presumption that a public safety officer who dies from COVID-19 or related complications sustained a personal injury in the line of duty."<sup>92</sup> Many police unions worked with management to tackle this challenge, a collaboration that may lead to further cooperation in the future.<sup>93</sup>

At the state level, the governor of New York signed a bill granting death benefits to families of law enforcement, public health workers, and other front-line workers who died of COVID-19.<sup>94</sup> Focusing on workers'

compensation, California Senate Bill 1159 makes it easier for police, firefighters, and other essential employees who contract COVID-19 while working to be covered under the state's workers' compensation program.<sup>95</sup>



Finally, at the local level, the Grand Traverse County (Michigan) Sheriff's Office used its federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act grant to provide more than 100 employees with \$1,000 each in hazard pay.<sup>96</sup>

### Encourage law enforcement personnel to monitor and attend to their mental health

To ensure an effective workforce, agencies should review their practices to support appropriate stress management and encourage employee self-care. As part of this effort, agencies have provided personnel with resources and tips to maintain healthy routines, build up resiliency skills, improve communications, and enhance self-care practices with activities such as meditation<sup>97</sup> and yoga. Agencies that had preexisting programs leaned on that programming to assist their staff: for example, the TRI Wellness Unit of the Hennepin County (Minnesota) Sheriff's Office provided officer support resources.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, the Evesham (New Jersey) Police Department deployed its wellness committee to attend roll call to support officers and share guidance on how parents can discuss COVID-19 with their children.<sup>99</sup> The Indianapolis (Indiana) Police Department coordinated officers from its Wounded Guardian program to visit and assist with their peers.

#### The Three P's

The California Peace Officers' Association encouraged law enforcement to "Avoid the Three Ps":

1. Do not **Personalize** the problem;
2. Remember that this situation is not **Permanent**;
3. Do not let this situation become **Pervasive** in every aspect of your life.

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Source: California Peace Officers' Association, "LEADS: No Nonsense Wellness Tactics for Keeping You, and Your Officers, Grounded During the Pandemic," webinar, April 2, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnS6a84bbP4&list=PLBTGYVZkeTjn\\_OMJXmVsYffUm-ku1qVB5&index=14](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnS6a84bbP4&list=PLBTGYVZkeTjn_OMJXmVsYffUm-ku1qVB5&index=14).

Some of these same resources are also being provided to family members.<sup>100</sup> In Clearwater, Florida, the agency deployed its Family Support Liaison program to assist family members with support, information, and an open line to answer questions.<sup>101</sup>

### Agency Spotlight

The Mecklenburg County (North Carolina) Sheriff's Office implemented a variety of creative and fun virtual engagement methods for staff to interact with one another, including daily mask postings, a 'wacky socks' challenge, and challenges through TikTok and other avenues. "Allowing your staff to see you as human and taking off your 'superior' hat to become one of them helps them connect with you and feel more open to asking for help," according to Sheriff Garry McFadden.

Source: National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, Executive Roundtable, April 29, 2020.

These services seemed to be consistent with the results from the Police1 *COVID-19's Impact on Law Enforcement Operations* survey of more than 200 Illinois agencies, which noted that 75 percent of respondents believed their departments had an increased interest in their physical and emotional wellness.<sup>102</sup>

### Agency Spotlight

The Boston Police Department peer support unit scheduled weekly Zoom meetings between the peer support officers and clinical staff. Through this collaboration, the unit has provided informative resources for employees on topics such as how officers and their families can assist their children with proper coping mechanisms, how to properly approach the complexities of having elderly parents, and other areas of concern. In addition, the unit reached out to every member of the department with a crisis management debriefing in order to debunk rumors and false information circulating about the pandemic and to alleviate any fears they may have raised. All services provided to members of the agency are also provided to their families.

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# Conclusion

Throughout the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, law enforcement leaders have faced a myriad of unique and historic challenges. To navigate these challenging times, leaders needed to be able to pivot quickly and fluidly to anticipate needs, identify solutions to complex problems, and maintain critical public safety operations. These abilities emerged as common factors across the themes presented in this report. Adapting effectively to address COVID-19's impact on law enforcement has meant enhancing or reconfiguring formal and informal systems, processes, and structures.

The lessons learned from collecting and reviewing these accomplishments include the following:

- **Collaboration.** Relationships and information sharing are key to good collaboration. Creating new relationships and leveraging existing relationships provide a foundation for partners to learn, share, network, and seek support and resources. Effective collaboration among local, county, and state agencies supports cross-jurisdictional solutions and resources. Partnerships with businesses and community institutions support innovation, advocacy, and public safety solutions tailored to community needs. An expanded network of peers allows for the constant exchange of information, ideas, and lessons learned through the lens of local, state, and national experiences.
- **Communication.** Communication is crucial, and there is no such thing as too much communication during a crisis. Effective leaders focused on proactively opening lines of communication all around them—establishing and maintaining clear and diverse lines of communication (both internal and external) to address concerns, share updates, and mitigate misinformation. In agencies small and large, these pathways of communication allowed leaders to be visible and present while keeping a finger on the pulse of the health and wellness of their agencies and their communities.
- **Technology.** Technology systems and solutions facilitated continuity and creativity in all facets of operations. Law enforcement adapted infrastructure and technology to support remote work environments, communication with the public, data-driven approaches to problems in rapidly changing environments, and innovative efficiencies while continuing to prioritize safe interactions for all.
- **Policies and procedures.** From changing shift schedules to reassigning resources, implementing health and safety precautions, addressing the needs of the public, and adjusting operations for a remote environment, law enforcement consistently reevaluated, revised, and adjusted policies and procedures to adapt to evolving conditions.

- **Education and advocacy.** Law enforcement focused on educating and advocating for their communities and public safety needs. Agencies worked to proactively engage the public and critical stakeholders to align messaging, explain and clarify policies and protocol, advocate for essential resources, and educate around emerging crime patterns. Collaborative partnerships supported community education campaigns and advocacy for vulnerable populations. Advocacy for personnel was a top priority as leaders identified barriers to the physical and emotional safety, wellness, and morale of staff and pursued supportive tools and resources.
- **Innovation.** Law enforcement was inspired to rethink traditional approaches and empowered to implement new concepts to solve complex public safety challenges they had not faced in modern times.

As of the time of this publication, vaccines are available for anyone over the age of 5, and booster shots have been rolled out for adults and for young people as young as 11. However, during the reopening of businesses, schools, social events, and travel, new variations of COVID-19 known as the delta and omicron variants have emerged, and there may be others yet to come.<sup>1</sup> Although law enforcement and the community have learned a lot since the start of the pandemic, the country is not yet through this difficult time. The challenges in this report are still fresh for some, but the goals should be timeless—to help law enforcement learn and apply the adaptations and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic to further public safety. Many innovative ideas have been implemented by law enforcement throughout the pandemic, and while most were created out of necessity, it is possible they will set a foundation for continued evolution in public safety and may transform into new norms.

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# Appendix.

## COVID-19 Response Around the World

Throughout the course of the pandemic, law enforcement agencies around the globe, like those in the United States, have contended with the challenges of re-evaluating operations, defining expectations around the enforcement of public health orders, countering shifting crime trends, and protecting vulnerable populations. Comparing the pandemic-related details and trends in public safety response around the world presents a unique and natural opportunity to learn from the global law enforcement field.

### **COVID-19 in Detention Facilities**

The United Nations (U.N.) High Commissioner for Human Rights placed particular emphasis on the potentially devastating impact of COVID-19 for those in government detention. Accordingly, the U.N. and its partners developed tools to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and ease congestion in prisons.

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Source: L. Adal, "Pandemic and Punishment," Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, last modified June 3, 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/pandemic-and-punishment/>; A. Zouev, "COVID-19 and the Rule of Law: A Dangerous Balancing Act," United Nations COVID-19 Response, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-and-rule-law-dangerous-balancing-act>.

Internationally, reporting within the law enforcement field on the global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has focused on administration and operation (theme 1), crime trends (theme 3), and enforcement of public health orders (theme 4). The issues of community impact and officer safety and wellness, this publication's other two themes, have been the focus of less reporting and study in the field.

### **Administration and operations**

Like many U.S.-based agencies, law enforcement around the world restructured its approach to shifts and staffing to ensure sufficient staff capacity to support public safety. In Canada, the York (Ontario) Regional Police built reserve forces by placing a percentage of healthy officers on leave, and the Ottawa (Ontario) Police Department quickly followed that example.<sup>1</sup> The Toronto (Ontario) Police Department deployed its strategic reserve so that 25 percent of front-line officers could be

off for 14 days without impacting successful operations.<sup>2</sup> In the Northwest Territories, a public health unit was created to enforce pandemic-related rules and regulations.<sup>3</sup> To minimize the risk of exposure to law enforcement, the Vancouver (British Columbia) Police Department leveraged the use of 311 and 811 to divert nonemergency calls away from 911.<sup>4</sup>

### Mutual Aid

Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland engaged in a mutual aid agreement, assisting one another in responding to emergency calls for service so that even in a call surge, no calls needed to go unanswered.

Source: PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," April 21, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril21>.

### Technology Spotlight

To address concerns related to the limited supply of PPE, the Toronto (Ontario) Police Department used an app to track PPE stock and determine burn rates.

To help maintain staffing capacity reduced by officers out because of illness or quarantine, the London (United Kingdom) Metropolitan Police Force reached out to recently retired officers to invite them to fill in. Further, the police force divided its command into two sections that did not intermingle with one another to prevent the virus from spreading through the entire agency.

Source: IACP, "Global Policing Symposium: Challenges and Lessons Learned," webinar, May 28, 2020, [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Policing%20Symposium%20May%202020%20Summary%20Report%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Policing%20Symposium%20May%202020%20Summary%20Report%20(1).pdf); PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," April 6, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril6>.

The Italian police force, the Arma dei Carabinieri, implemented operational adaptations to mitigate COVID-19 risks and preserve officer safety; these adaptations included creating separate shifts; pairing fixed, rather than rotational, partners for patrols, who slept in the same rooms on base; ceasing training operations; decreasing seats in mess halls by 50 percent; and creating isolation areas for officers to obtain their duty weapons without physical interaction, monitored through camera surveillance.<sup>5</sup>

### **Crisis Management**

Some agencies have repurposed crisis management programs originally intended for disasters such as earthquakes and adapted them to address operations during the pandemic. Building crisis plans that maintain flexibility to adapt to the unforeseen is important for generating deeper value from these resources.

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Source: IACP, "Global Policing Symposium: Challenges and Lessons Learned," webinar, May 28, 2020, [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Policing%20Symposium%20May%202020%20Summary%20Report%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Policing%20Symposium%20May%202020%20Summary%20Report%20(1).pdf).

## **Community impact**

The pandemic has undoubtedly affected communities around the world, although community relations have not been the focus of most reporting on law enforcement measures. During the lockdown period in India, both personal vehicles and public transportation were restricted; in response, police patrol vans were stationed throughout the city to transport women in labor to nearby hospitals for safe delivery, take unhoused people to shelter homes, and coordinate food transport with community organizations.<sup>6</sup> The community policing wing of the Kerala Police supported individuals through outreach to vulnerable populations such as those in need of medications and other necessities.<sup>7</sup>

### **COVID Cars**

The Northern Ireland Police Service developed "COVID Cars," equipped with PPE and staff specially trained to respond to individuals exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. The agency also designated specialized custody suites for symptomatic detainees.

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Source: PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," April 6, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril6>.

In Italy, the Arma dei Carabinieri worked to assist the community with tasks such as bringing pensions to the elderly, delivering tablets and computers to students, and helping with grocery shopping or medical necessities.<sup>8</sup>

## Crime trends

As in the United States, global crime trends varied during the pandemic. Globally, crimes such as traffic offenses, burglaries, and some organized crime appeared to decrease. In Mexico, fewer people riding buses correlated with a 45.1 percent drop in robberies on public transportation during the first six months of 2020.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, with fewer people visiting public places, kidnappings also decreased by 37.3 percent.<sup>10</sup>

### Crime Impacts in Scotland

As people in Scotland seeking outdoor solitary activities turned to illegal hunting and fishing, wildlife crimes rose 82.9 percent in 2020 from the prior year. Further, incidents of antisocial behavior had increased 34 percent from the year before, and online child sexual abuse crimes had increased by 18.4 percent. Fraud increased by 45.4 percent in a 12-month period and by 83.4 percent over a five-year average. Assaults on emergency workers, primarily police, also rose by 7 percent from the year before, and by 20.4 percent over a five-year average.

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Sources: P. O'Hare, "Covid in Scotland: How Has the Pandemic Affected Crime Levels?" *BBC News*, last modified November 12, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-54916511>; T. McMahon, "Quarterly Policing Performance Report - Q2 2020/21," briefing presented to Scottish Police Authority Policing Performance Committee videoconference, November 17, 2020, <https://www.spa.police.uk/spa-media/fixsem1bg/item-2-1-graphics-version-q2-policing-performance-report.pdf>.

In Vancouver, Canada, sexual offences, robberies, and property crimes decreased in 2020 compared to 2019. However, intimate partner violence increased by 5 percent, representing the highest incidence recorded.<sup>11</sup> In Mexico, data for the first six months of 2020 reflected an increase of 1.9 percent in homicides from the same timeframe in 2019, with a 9.2 percent increase in homicides of women.<sup>12</sup>

According to research published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, complaints to the National Commission for Women in India showed 131 percent more incidents of domestic violence during May 2020 in the districts that had the strictest lockdown measures imposed than in districts with the fewest restrictions. These data add to the growing pool of evidence on the impacts of intimate partner violence during the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

## Technology Spotlight

In Italy, a significant decline in domestic violence calls to police and hotlines led to concern for the health and welfare of domestic violence victims with no way to seek help. Italian police adapted a mobile app to allow victims to send messages or pictures to report domestic violence without alerting their partners.

Source: C. Cristoferi, and G. Fonte, "In Italy, Support Groups Fear Lockdown Is Silencing Domestic Abuse Victims," Reuters, last modified April 4, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-italy-violence-idUSKBN21MOPM>; Y. Talmazan et al., "European Countries Develop New Ways to Tackle Domestic Violence During Coronavirus Lockdowns," *NBC News*, last modified April 13, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/european-countries-develop-new-ways-tackle-domestic-violence-during-coronavirus-n1174301>; "Youpol: l'App per Bullismo, Spaccio e Maltrattamenti in Famiglia," Polizia di Stato, last modified November 23, 2021, <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/165e7a3376a831d972566655>.

According to London's (United Kingdom) police force, incidents of domestic violence rose by a third,<sup>14</sup> while an advocacy organization also reported a 25 percent increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline.<sup>15</sup> Concerns about the rise in domestic violence prompted the rollout of a code word plan in Britain; the plan gave victims a route to discreetly seek help by providing a code word to shop staff while they were outside the home shopping for food or medicine. Other agencies in Spain, Italy, and Argentina launched similar programs.<sup>16</sup>

Another global trend was the rise in incidents based on hate and extremism. Extremist groups and terrorist organizations threatened global security and grew their influence. Security agencies and researchers monitored an increase in racially motivated hate crimes committed or instigated by extremists online—a threat that became more

pronounced as populations spent more time online as a result of stay-at-home orders.<sup>17</sup> Far-right extremist groups in North America and Europe built propaganda campaigns around COVID-19 that targeted communities including ethnic minorities,<sup>18</sup> Jews, Muslims, migrants, and others.<sup>19</sup>

Researchers from Tel Aviv University in Israel found that the coronavirus pandemic significantly heightened antisemitism and anti-Zionist propaganda across the globe. This propaganda promotes a narrative accusing Jews and Israel of either causing the virus, refusing to maintain hygiene and physical distancing measures, or benefiting from the virus. Further antisemitic groups framed the virus as divine punishment of Jews and used Holocaust language and imagery while protesting pandemic restrictions.<sup>20</sup>

Hate crimes targeting individuals of Asian descent increased by 138 percent in the first nine months of 2020 in Vancouver, Canada,<sup>21</sup> including assaults, vandalism, and intimidation.<sup>22</sup> The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) leveraged Mandarin- and Cantonese-speaking officers for community outreach, engaged cultural community leaders to host WebEx forums, translated and disseminated materials on hate crimes, and worked with the local Asian media market to alert the public.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, various agencies in Europe grew concerned that the pandemic was giving the Islamic State and other militants opportunity to regain influence,<sup>24</sup> using the social chaos to capitalize on extremist ideologies.<sup>25</sup> A U.N. Security Council report identified a notable increase in ISIS attacks in Iraq and Syria.<sup>26</sup> Various international agencies voiced concern for the pandemic's potential budget impacts on counterterrorism-related efforts, many dependent on western support.<sup>27</sup>

Other types of organized crime increased as well as terrorism. Cybercrime, fraudulent schemes, money laundering, drug trafficking, and human trafficking were all perpetrated by organized groups. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) warned of organized crime groups (OGC) exploiting the global economic crisis to increase profits through misuse of public funds and the infiltration of private companies.<sup>28</sup> With a high volume of business and social activities moving to virtual spaces, cybercrime and cyberattacks increased, leading to corresponding increases in phishing, credit card fraud, pirated sites for fake donations, and reports of fake and cloned websites.<sup>29</sup> In the first weeks of the pandemic, Europol noted a sharp increase in cybercrime.<sup>30</sup> In October 2020, Europol released its annual *Internet Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, noting ransomware attacks; the distribution of child abuse material, including sexual abuse; SIM swapping; and the use of the dark web for criminal activities, online scams, and phishing, all of which had increased at the onset of and throughout the pandemic.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, Interpol issued an alert globally warning of OGCs that might try to steal COVID-19 testing kits or vaccine supplies or sell fake ones.<sup>32</sup> Thirteen national chapters of Transparency International in Latin America voiced significant concern for the risks of corruption to public procurement processes.<sup>33</sup>

In the Northern Triangle region consisting of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, underworld gang economies supported through extortion were affected by reduced cash flow when legitimate businesses ceased operations.<sup>34</sup> Gangs began to issue "a payment truce to some markets in Guatemala and El Salvador."<sup>35</sup> Some gangs raised their "rents" with those businesses permitted to stay open by law and intimidated community members by serving as enforcers of government curfews.<sup>36</sup>

### Combating Pandemic Fraud

The #TogetherAgainstFraud campaign was launched nationally in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in partnership with UAE Banks Federation, the Central Bank of the UAE, Abu Dhabi Police, and Dubai Police to raise awareness and education around financial fraud and cybercrime brought about because of the pandemic. The campaign's success led to an extension of the effort through 2021.

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Sources: A. Geronimo, "#TogetherAgainstFraud: UAE Launches Fraud Awareness Campaign Amid COVID-19 Pandemic," Tahawultech.com, last modified April 15, 2020, <https://www.tahawultech.com/region/uae/togetheragainstfraud-uae-launches-fraud-awareness-campaign-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>; "National Fraud Awareness Campaign Extended," *Khaleej Times*, May 31, 2021, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/business/national-fraud-awareness-campaign-extended>.

The UNODC also alerted law enforcement that drug traffickers may be seeking new routes and methods for moving drugs, including through the darknet and mail shipments, as their traditional paths were cut off because of travel limitations.<sup>37</sup>









In Mexico, as police and officials fell sick with the coronavirus, security forces were diverted to guard medical centers, and military barracks were converted to COVID-19 clinics, leaving a possible security void in the fight against drug cartels.<sup>38</sup> Of the three federal forces, 50 percent of the available sworn staff were assigned to non-crime fighting duties related to security and pandemic support.<sup>39</sup>

In North Wales, police raised concerns over urban gangs exploiting children through peers and technology. Adapting to lockdown restrictions, gangs began recruiting local youth outside their existing networks to distribute drugs, thereby achieving easier entry into smaller towns.<sup>40</sup> Drug dealers in the United Kingdom were also observed to pose as joggers on the street or toss their products from vehicle windows.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Interpol issued an alert warning of an increase in drug dealers using food delivery services to transport their products.<sup>42</sup> In Mexico, street-level drug-dealing cases declined by 12.1 percent during the first six months of 2020; however, this decrease may have been partially due to reduced street traffic during the pandemic.<sup>43</sup>

Spikes in drug use and opioid overdoses were seen in multiple provinces across Canada, including Manitoba<sup>44</sup> and British Columbia. While the VPD had seen positive progress in overall reduction rates in 2019, overdose rates in Vancouver rose to almost one per day at the onset of the pandemic. In June 2020, 52 deaths marked the VPD's highest rate of overdoses in a single month, with 175 deaths across the province of British Columbia.<sup>45</sup> These rates may have been affected by the need for physical distancing causing a decrease in visits to supervised consumption and drug identification sites<sup>46</sup> and limited space in drug treatment facilities.<sup>47</sup> Globally, opioid shortages may have led to individuals substituting other substances like alcohol or benzodiazepines or mixing opioids with synthetic drugs.<sup>48</sup>

## Pandemic Impacts on Human Trafficking

Through input from stakeholders and initial findings from a COVID-19 impact survey, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime identified eight factors likely to drive human trafficking that are exacerbated in a crisis like the pandemic.

 <p><b>1. Intensifying drivers and root causes of human trafficking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Vulnerability may increase among existing victims, vulnerable groups (including trafficking survivors) and those who were previously less vulnerable to human trafficking.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>2. Heightened and changed forms of exploitation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increased abuse.</li> <li>■ Shifts towards alternative exploitation types.</li> <li>■ 'Adjusted' criminal modus operandi.</li> <li>■ Supply of new criminal recruits.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>3. Multifaceted impact on children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rise in online child sexual exploitation.</li> <li>■ Depriving many children of one or both parents and/or caregivers, thus increasing their vulnerability to trafficking.</li> <li>■ Increased rates of child labour and child marriage.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>4. Shift towards informality in both formal and informal sectors of global supply chains</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More opportunities for criminals to exploit in informal sectors due to increased supply of vulnerable groups.</li> <li>■ Coronavirus-induced economic crisis incentivizes businesses to exploit workers to remain viable.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>5. Increased illegal and irregular migration flows</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More people will be forced to move irregularly.</li> <li>■ Irregular migrants are likely to experience increased human-trafficking risks.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>6. Disruption in victim assistance and support services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ NGOs have been dramatically limited in their anti-trafficking response, including cancelling victim rescue missions, shelters, in-person counselling and legal-assistance services.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>7. Reduced enforcement, policing, investigation and justice system capacities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Delays and/or reductions in law-enforcement operations and investigations of human-trafficking cases.</li> <li>■ Disruptions in criminal justice systems, court cases being put on hold.</li> <li>■ Decreased cyber-security and monitoring capacities of the private sector.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>8. Interrupted financial support and funding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Grants and donations are in steep decline, leading to reduced financial support for anti-trafficking efforts and organizations.</li> <li>■ NGOs and research institutions are facing shortages of funding, delays or cancellations of ongoing research projects as donors and foundations switch priorities.</li> </ul>

Impact of the coronavirus on human trafficking. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

Source: L. Wagner and T. Hoang, *Aggravating Circumstances: How Coronavirus Impacts Human Trafficking*, policy brief (Geneva, Switzerland: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020), <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Aggravating-circumstances-How-coronavirus-impacts-human-trafficking-GITOC-1.pdf>.



The drug markets were altered substantially, particularly in and through East Africa. Routes for the heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine trade were restricted by a decrease in global travel, which, in turn, led individuals with addictions to hoard or dilute their drugs.<sup>49</sup> In Morocco, lockdown travel permits for food truck drivers created an opportunity for drug smugglers to transport cannabis.<sup>50</sup> While the lockdown did not stop the trafficking of cannabis, travel limitations did stop cocaine shipments from flying through Morocco. Moreover, a tip from U.S. authorities led to the seizure by Spanish authorities of 3.8 metric tons of cocaine from the port in Valencia; the cocaine had been sent from Latin America by drug traffickers who believed that police presence would decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>51</sup>

Pandemic-related economic struggles left some business owners open to exploitation by organized crime. In Rome, Italy, police seized Mafia assets worth 20 million euros (\$22.5 million), believed to be from extortion and loansharking, and intercepted calls threatening further violence and death if payments were not made.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Financial Guard officers in Sicily arrested 91 suspected Mafiosi for money laundering, extortion, and drug trafficking with the intent to purchase struggling businesses.<sup>53</sup>

Economic impacts of the pandemic likely increased the vulnerability of disadvantaged communities to substance use and enhanced financial incentive to engage in drug trafficking and cultivation.<sup>54</sup> Unemployment in Colombia increased to 21 percent by July 2020, and the impacts on the country's poorest populations led to an increase in looting of food and gasoline.<sup>55</sup> The country's vulnerable populations were also targeted by armed militant groups imposing coronavirus rules which were enforced by kidnapping, arson, murder, and other types of violence.<sup>56</sup>

Further, specific COVID-19–related crimes emerged, leading to the need to reshape or create laws and regulations in some countries.<sup>57</sup> For example, in South Africa, new regulations criminalized malicious falsehoods about COVID-19, which simultaneously led to concerns about freedom of information and expression.<sup>58</sup>

## Enforcement of public health orders

### Technology Spotlight

A smart helmet, equipped with thermal technology that conducts contactless rapid screening, was used by the Dubai (United Arab Emirates) Police Force to monitor health and detect COVID-19. The helmet can scan in seconds the temperature of people in crowds, at events, or using public transportation and is part of the department's strategy to isolate and provide health support to those with COVID-19 while preventing the spread of the virus.

In the United Kingdom, police have employed the "4 E's" approach to obtaining compliance with public health orders:

1. **Engage** by talking with individuals.
2. **Explain** the rules.
3. **Encourage** compliance.
4. **Enforce** with a fine if individuals refuse to comply.

Police officers were encouraged to persuade and advise community members on public health orders before imposing any penalties.

Source: PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," April 6, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidapril6>; PERF, "PERF Daily COVID-19 Report," May 20, 2020, <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmay20>; C. Hymas, "Police To Use Persuasion Rather Than Punishment To Enforce Coronavirus Lockdown," *The Telegraph*, March 24, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/24/police-use-persuasion-ratherpunishment-enforce-coronavirus/>; M. Vincent, "Police Vow To Crack Down on Rule-Breakers after Officers Called to Anti-Mask Protests, Illegal Raves, and Even a Child's Birthday Party with 40 Guests Packed into Two Rooms on First Weekend of Winter Lockdown," *Daily Mail*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8928655/Police-vow-crack-rule-breakers-officers-called-anti-mask-protests.html>.

Like law enforcement in the United States, police around the world played a significant role in the enforcement of lockdown and public health orders.

The Scottish Police Authority enacted emergency legislation that gave authorities additional powers to cancel events, close event spaces, and enforce COVID-19 testing.<sup>59</sup>

Enforcement efforts were met with greater hostility as the public grew weary of lockdowns. In the UK, segments of the public grew frustrated and anti-lockdown protests, illegal raves, and other mass gatherings defied the rules.<sup>60</sup>

Protests across Italy, violent at times, also resulted in an increased police patrol presence and clashes between the police and the public.<sup>61</sup> Early in pandemic lockdown, violent prison riots in Italy and their sensationalistic media coverage placed the country on edge.<sup>62</sup> The riots were triggered by a COVID-19–related ban on family visits and the heightened risk of the virus's spread within prisons; however, fears spread that the riots were coordinated through the Mafia as authorities discussed the potential for releasing Mafia bosses on account of ill health and vulnerability to COVID-19.<sup>63</sup>

A requirement to wear masks indoors and on public transportation conflicted with a German law making it illegal to cover one's face when participating in a public gathering

such as a protest or strike.<sup>64</sup> An amendment to this regulation was created in response to the pandemic, clarifying that existing laws preventing mask-wearing would not apply to face coverings aimed at reducing the spread of coronavirus. Officers were expected to use discretion in determining what type of masks were acceptable.<sup>65</sup>

Police in Spain used drones to monitor the streets for people breaking pandemic lockdown restrictions, communicating with the public via drone-mounted speakers.<sup>66</sup> Drones were also employed by Portuguese police to monitor the border with Spain after pandemic-related border restrictions were announced.<sup>67</sup>

In Nice, France, police used cameras throughout the city equipped with speakers to monitor public behavior and firmly remind community members of COVID-19–related regulations and social expectations. Recorded reminders of these were also broadcast every 30 minutes between 9:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. in areas where the public gathered.<sup>68</sup> The city also attempted to deploy drones to enforce lockdowns; however, a court ruling banned their use—first until concerns surrounding privacy could be adequately addressed, and then permanently in a subsequent ruling.<sup>69</sup>

To increase public awareness, Interpol’s Project RHINO (Response capability, Hazard assessment, Infection control, National coordination, and Organization change) launched an awareness video on April 9, 2020. The video highlighted the importance of cooperation and coordination between law enforcement and health services, including the role of law enforcement in response to an outbreak.<sup>70</sup> International law enforcement agencies and global organizations mobilized to share information, issue alerts, and monitor (and at times anticipate) trends in public safety.

The Israeli Police Force used large-scale ground operations directed at specific neighborhoods where COVID-19 infection rates were high to enforce quarantine isolation rules and take people to the hospital if needed. Additional enforcement was carried out by tracking cell phone locations of individuals with COVID-19 to ensure they were isolating at home.<sup>71</sup>

## Technology Spotlight

Authorities in Spain used sensors and traffic lights to monitor the number of people on beaches and to report those numbers in real time. Across six designated beaches, sensors tracked how many people were present, and traffic lights linked to the sensors turned red when the beaches become too crowded.

Source: S. Lock and N. Penza, “Sunbed Wars: Police Called to Beaches in Spain as Rows Erupt over Social Distancing Queues and Sunbathers Turned Away,” *U.S. Sun*, last modified June 24, 2020, <https://www.the-sun.com/news/1034759/police-patrol-spain-beaches-tourists/>.

When a mandatory national lockdown was announced with police expected to enforce restrictions, the Delhi Police in India began a community education campaign in partnership with resident-welfare associations, neighborhood watch committees, and other community platforms to raise awareness of the serious health and legal consequences of violating public health regulations.<sup>72</sup>

## Officer safety and wellness

Police officers' safety and wellness received less attention globally than domestically. However, some agencies across the globe did report increases in assaults on police and other first responders. In 2020, the VPD reported assaults against police officers rose 47 percent from 2019,<sup>73</sup> while in Scotland, assaults on all emergency workers—primarily police—rose by 7 percent from 2019 and rose 20.4 percent compared to a five-year average.<sup>74</sup>

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## About CRI-TAC

The **Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC)**, a program developed by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), provides critical and tailored technical assistance resources to state, local, territorial, tribal, and campus law enforcement agencies on a wide variety of topics. The program has served as the premier technical assistance program of the COPS Office since 2011.

CRI-TAC brings together an unprecedented coalition of leading law enforcement organizations to deliver the most comprehensive and tailored solutions available for requesting agencies. This collaboration ensures that CRI-TAC solutions meet the needs of law enforcement agencies in a “by the field, for the field” approach. Partnering associations include the following:

- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)
- FBI National Academy Associates, Inc. (FBINAA)
- Fraternal Order of Police (FOP)
- International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA)
- International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST)
- National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE)
- National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)
- National Sheriffs’ Association (NSA)
- National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA)



# About the IACP

The **International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)** is the world's largest and most influential professional association for police leaders. With more than 30,000 members in more than 165 countries, the IACP is a recognized leader in global policing. Since 1893, the association has been speaking out on behalf of law enforcement and advancing leadership and professionalism in policing worldwide.

The IACP is known for its commitment to shaping the future of the police profession. Through timely research, programming, and unparalleled training opportunities, the IACP is preparing current and emerging police leaders—and the agencies and communities they serve—to succeed in addressing the most pressing issues, threats, and challenges of the day.

The IACP is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. The IACP is the publisher of *The Police Chief* magazine, the leading periodical for law enforcement executives, and the host of the IACP Annual Conference, the largest police educational and technology exposition in the world. IACP membership is open to law enforcement professionals of all ranks, as well as non-sworn leaders across the criminal justice system. Learn more about the IACP at [www.theIACP.org](http://www.theIACP.org).

# About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than \$20 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 136,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.
- Almost 800 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.

The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement. COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.



The COVID-19 public health emergency drastically affected law enforcement. The functions of law enforcement required in-person work and community interaction, and law enforcement agencies were challenged to maintain operational levels of service while keeping officers, employees, and community members safe.

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) monitored law enforcement pandemic response from March 2020 through the year's end, sourcing data from public reports, meetings and forums, and personal correspondence. This report, *Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC): COVID-19 Law Enforcement Impact and Response*, synthesizes their findings into five themes, compiling challenges, promising practices, and lessons learned about administration and operations, community impact, crime trends, enforcement, and officer safety and wellness. Agency innovations and COVID-19 resources are highlighted throughout.



**COPS**

Community Oriented Policing Services  
U.S. Department of Justice

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To obtain details about COPS Office programs,  
call the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at [cops.usdoj.gov](https://cops.usdoj.gov).