



# PALO ALTO POLICE DEPARTMENT

## CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS SPRING 2020







CHIEF ROBERT A. JONSEN

# INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus global pandemic is forcing everyone to change their behavior, routines, and way of living. At the Palo Alto Police Department, we are no different. We, like you, are all having to learn a “new normal,” which admittedly can seem like a moving target with the constant influx of new information and data. We, like you, have had to examine and change our procedures.

We wanted to produce this Coronavirus Response Considerations document in an effort to assist other agencies in planning their response to the pandemic. This is not a “best practices” document; in this current operating environment, in fact, the term “best practices” is a misnomer. We, like everyone else, are facing uncharted waters. A practice in place today that we earnestly believe is reasonable, may tomorrow be shown to be ill-advised or unwise.

Rather, this document lists considerations that have shaped and informed the Palo Alto Police Department’s current response to the situation, a response that we are continually evaluating and adapting. These considerations have been liberally borrowed from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, partner public safety agencies, private organizations, community groups, and others. In this document, we have chosen to keep these considerations general, recognizing that operational differences between agencies prevent a one-size-fits-all approach.

We’re all in this together, and as we move deeper into 2020, it will be more important than ever for us all to work together collectively for the greater good of our communities. Our operations as I write this in March 2020 look completely different than they did in January 2020, and I predict will look different still in May 2020. One thing will always remain, though: the professionalism of the men and women of the Palo Alto Police Department. I have been continually impressed during this crisis with how they answer the call to serve in the face of uncertainty, danger, and risk, both to them and their families. And their dedication and service has been echoed by personnel in all other City of Palo Alto departments, who have come together with an all-hands-on-deck, cooperative, team-first approach that is admirable. With my front row view of the inner workings of the City’s response and leadership in this time of crisis, I’ve never been prouder to be a public employee than I am today.



Be Well.

Robert A. Jonsen

# CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

## EQUIPMENT NEEDS / PPE



At the onset of the pandemic, the Department's logistics officer identified the supplies and equipment necessary to ensure the health and safety of our personnel for an extended operational period.

This included personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies to sanitize duty gear, patrol vehicles, and work stations.



The Department had a substantial pre-existing stock of N95 masks and gloves, which is expected to last for approximately six months, even under present pandemic conditions. The Department did not maintain a meaningful supply of safety glasses or goggles, but these were acquired with little difficulty through existing supply channels.

The Department's pre-existing stock of sanitizing supplies was adequate, under normal use conditions, for one to two months; however, under current conditions, it would have been consumed in one to two weeks if not replenished. The Department found that sanitizing supplies, particularly hand sanitizer and wipes, were completely unavailable from its normal commercial suppliers, but by expanding its search to include non-traditional suppliers, such as office supply companies and web-based vendors, the Department was able to identify alternative suppliers and acquire adequate additional stock.

The Department's pre-existing vendor has been able to provide needed uniform, equipment, site and vehicle decontamination and has the staffing and equipment to continue to do so even if demand increases.

### Considerations:

- Identify one officer or staff member responsible for regularly inventorying and re-ordering emergency supplies.
- Be aware that certain PPE has a "use-by" date, such as the 5-year shelf life 3M assigns to most models of its N95 masks. Note that, prior to February 2020, 3M did not print "use-by dates" on its products.
- Maintain an updated list of suppliers for PPE and cleaning supplies, including alternate suppliers outside the typical public safety supply chain.



## CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

# EXPOSURE PROTOCOLS



Early on, the Department determined a critical component of dealing with this pandemic was addressing how to protect personnel if they were exposed to the Coronavirus. We knew how quickly the virus could spread and wanted to ensure that we had a healthy workforce. It was prudent to have a plan in place to address various exposure scenarios. The Department relied on guidelines by the CDC when sending memos to staff regarding symptoms; it also aided in our effort when designing safety procedures.

### Considerations

- Put together guidelines for police personnel (sworn and non-sworn) to follow if they are experiencing Coronavirus symptoms at home, at work, or believe they or a family member was exposed to a person who tested positive
- A plan should be established if an officer is exposed and next steps (include notification to supervisor, decontamination, testing)
- Establish when an employee should get tested and where
- Have a thermometer with disposable covers available to officers for self-monitoring
- Address general decontamination of officer patrol cars, clothing, etc.
- Set up guidelines for when an employee can return to work after they were exposed



# CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

## TESTING PROCEDURES



Despite the conflicting and ever-changing information on the Coronavirus, the Palo Alto Police Department partnered with the Palo Alto Fire Department to quickly develop response protocols for the exposure of any City employees to the virus, as well as secure expedient testing of our first responders who display symptoms of infection. Department staff worked closely with the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health and Stanford Health Care (who operates the Level 1 trauma center in our jurisdiction) to communicate the most current information surrounding exposure and first responder testing. With the goal of keeping a healthy and functional force of first responders, specific allowances were put in place to prioritize the rapid testing of first responders with flu-like symptoms at various drive-up test sites throughout the Bay Area. This type of agreement helps agencies quickly identify employees with the virus and allow for prompt quarantine, while lessening the likelihood that entire workgroups could become exposed via ill coworkers.

Another step to combat unknowingly ill employees from continuing to work is to institute a procedure on screening employees for signs of illness. Some agencies have opted to mandate that officers take a temperature reading of themselves at the beginning of their shift, or voluntarily supply one, to ensure they do not have a fever. Prior to providing the equipment for our officers to voluntarily take their temperature at work, staff communicated with the EMS Chief with the Palo Alto Fire Department and with the police officers' labor union to ensure that accurate, mutually agreed upon procedures were in place, and that employees felt comfortable that the process was in place out of concern for their health and the health of their coworkers.



## CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

# TELEWORKING STAFF



Following the intent set forth in the public health order issued by the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, our City and our Department made a concerted effort early in the crisis to allow as many staff to telework (i.e. “work from home”) as possible. As the crisis intensified, the number of these positions grew as our response adapted. Ultimately, the only staff coming to the office to perform their jobs were certain administrators, field personnel, public safety dispatchers, and limited support staff (to include records specialists, property / evidence technicians, and court liaison). Within the first week of the issuance of the public health order, we directed our detective bureau to telework, in an effort to keep them as healthy as possible in the event personnel in the patrol division fell ill and needed to be replaced.





#### Considerations:

- Develop a document to track teleworking staff that includes approvals of work schedules up the chain of command, to include Human Resources
- Provide teleworking personnel with specific guidelines and expectations for work performance, working hours, and accessibility
- Ensure teleworking personnel have the appropriate equipment to access necessary City resources (laptops with virtual private network connections and appropriate network security measures, remote access to specific software systems, remote access to VOIP desk phones, and so forth)
- Ensure teleworking personnel are familiar with video conference applications (the City uses Microsoft Teams) to facilitate collaborative team meetings and check-ins
- Have supervisors and managers conduct regular check-ins with teleworking personnel to ensure work is being completed, any employee needs are being met, and the lines of communication remain open to the point that the employee still feels connected to the workforce



## CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

# REASSIGNMENT OF EMPLOYEES



The Department's priority during our response to the Coronavirus pandemic has been to ensure that high-visibility patrols are regularly conducted around town. To that end, many of the immediate staffing decisions we made were designed to supplement staffing in our patrol division.

For example, on the first day of the shelter-in-place health order, we immediately provided our Traffic Team and Special Enforcement Team with directed patrol assignments (including assigning our Special Enforcement Team as the Department liaison to our community's grocery stores, ensuring ongoing contact at least weekly with a general manager from every grocery store to ensure any public safety needs were being met). We also suspended parking enforcement duties, instead providing high-visibility patrol assignments to our Community Service Officers. We recalled two officers that had been assigned to county task force assignments, and put them on patrol duty. We reassigned our two School Resource Officers to patrol duties, as public schools were of course closed. We also directed our detective bureau to telework, in an effort to keep them as healthy as possible in the event personnel in the patrol division fell ill and needed to be replaced.

All of these decisions were made to maximize the number of personnel on patrol who were able to be a highly visible presence to deter crime, reassure our community members, and ensure that public safety was maintained at the highest possible level.



# CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

## LODGING FOR WORKERS



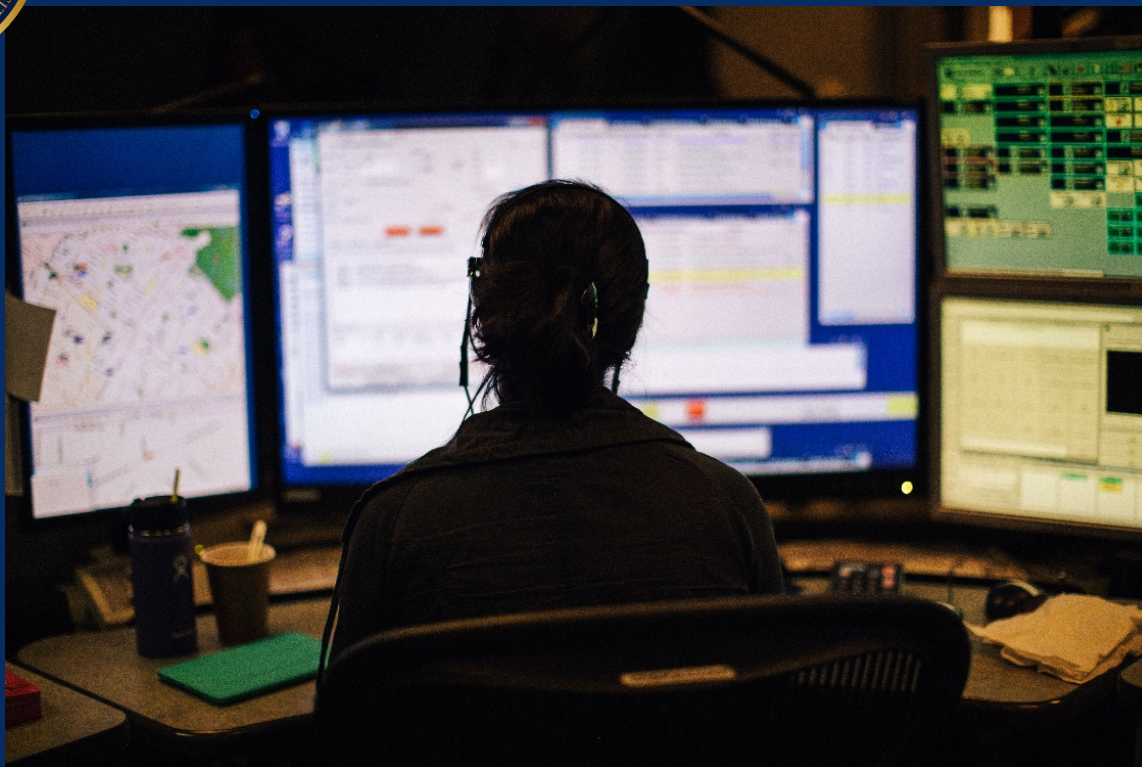
In the first days of the crisis, the City of Palo Alto identified “essential workers” as key staff who must remain at work, employed to support critical operations of each City department. For the Police Department’s first responders, we recognized that some employees, while unflinchingly dedicated to their job of public service, were nonetheless understandably concerned about their increased risk of exposure to the Coronavirus due to their need to interact with the public. These front-line personnel may be hesitant to return home during their workweek, concerned with the possibility of increasing the risk of exposure to their families.

Leadership within the City of Palo Alto recognized a need to support temporary sleeping quarters for the Department’s essential workers. City leadership collaborated with hotel managers throughout the local area to arrange for reduced-rate temporary lodging during the workweek of essential employees who requested it. This option will remain in place for the duration of the crisis to support the wellbeing of our personnel and their families.



## CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

# SERVICE CHANGES



While developing our response protocols to the Coronavirus pandemic, our focus has remained on maintaining as high a level of customer service to our community as possible under the circumstances. If a particular service was discontinued, our goal was to offer a reasonable alternative whenever possible. We continually stressed to our personnel the need to maintain proper social distancing at all times, and to don personal protective equipment (PPE) as appropriate for the situation.

During this trying time, we have placed an emphasis on our patrol division and other essential personnel who perform tasks associated with the fundamental nature of policework (dispatching, records processing, court liaison work, evidence processing, and so forth).

### Considerations:

- Limit self-initiated activity by field personnel to reduce the necessity for close person-to-person contact
- For non-emergency calls for service that can be completed via phone or video, enable field personnel to use those methods to investigate cases in order to limit person-to-person contact
- Cancel non-mandatory training classes and suspend the approval of any new non-mandatory training or travel





# CITY SERVICE CHANGES COVID-19

- Instruct field personnel to withdraw from any location once it has been stabilized and/or a law enforcement presence is no longer necessary
- Postpone all non-essential programs, like Citizens Police Academy classes
- Limit access to secure areas of police station to Department personnel, arrestees, and those providing essential services in support of continued field operations.
- Discontinue public tours of police station and ride-along program
- Limit or eliminate public lobby hours, and switch to a front desk service model that is by appointment only
- Implement or enhance online reporting tools, to allow community members to receive service electronically
- Place signage outside police station informing public of service changes and provide phone number to call for questions
- Property releases to be conducted by appointment only, after property owner is pre-screened on phone for flu-like symptoms. Delay release of property until the person is healthy, or have another healthy party pick up property on their behalf
- Suspend non-essential tasks for front desk personnel (citation sign-offs, pre-booking appointments, vehicle releases, etc.) whenever possible



## CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

# COMM. SUPPORT CALL CENTER

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT CALL CENTER



Connecting our  
community with  
answers and resources  
8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**CALL 650.272.3181**

Learn more at [www.cityofpaloalto.org/coronavirus](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/coronavirus)



One novel approach that the City of Palo Alto took in the early days of the crisis was to establish a Community Support Call Center (CSCC) to field general coronavirus inquiries from the public and to connect them with answers and resources. The CSCC is available by phone between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday through Friday; those hours and days may change as the situation evolves.

The CSCC is not located at a physical “call center” location; rather, it is staffed virtually by teleworking employees from the Library Department and the Community Services Department. The Police Department itself is not directly involved in the operation of the CSCC, but our personnel directly benefit from it because it ensures our residents are being given accurate information and referred to appropriate resources. It has had a positive effect on our public safety dispatchers, who unlike in the early days of the crisis, are now no longer having to field basic inquiries from the public and tie up emergency lines.

The CSCC personnel are provided with a script to answer common questions, as well as a list of available resources to which to point residents. The script can and does change, as new information comes in or new procedures are adopted. Material in the script is authored by managers from various City departments as appropriate to the nature of the content, and centralized through the Chief Communications Officer in the City Manager’s Office. When changes are made to the script, those changes are also contemporaneously updated on other City communication channels as appropriate (to include the [City’s website](#) and the [City’s Coronavirus FAQ blog on Medium](#)) to ensure consistency in messaging.





## Your Questions, Answered

### Considerations:

- Develop staffing model (who, how many, and from which Departments)
- Evaluate technology needs for any teleworking personnel
- Identify a point of contact from each affected Department as a resource to inform CSCC script answers
- Establish a procedure to track inquiries received by CSCC call takers; identify common themes to inform future City communications
- Ensure consistency in messaging between CSCC script answers and all City communications; make updates in a timely way as appropriate
- Use public inquiries being received by public safety dispatchers to inform CSCC script answers as necessary

For more information about the City of Palo Alto's CSCC, send an e-mail to [pd@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:pd@cityofpaloalto.org) and we will have the appropriate staff respond.



# Coronavirus DAILY REPORT



At the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic, a decision was made at the City level to centralize all public communications through the City Manager's Office. The City Manager's Chief Communications Officer assembled a team of communications professionals from across the organization and convened meetings with them at least once a day to assign tasks, delegate assignments, and streamline messaging. Consistency in messaging during a crisis is critical, and it helps to build public trust in government. Public information officers from different City departments share the City's posts from their own accounts, greatly amplifying the City's message in a consistent way.

The City's communications team (made up of specialized personnel from the City Manager's Office, the Utilities Department, the Library Department, the Fire Department, and the Police Department) works together on a daily basis to produce a number of public communications during the crisis. This includes ongoing and regular updates distributed across a variety of platforms, to include the [City website](#), a [daily e-blast](#) with news to e-mail subscribers, social media channels ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), and [Nextdoor](#)), and the Community Support Call Center script. All media inquiries received by any Department, and any social media inquiry received by any Department, are routed to the Chief Communications Officer for an approved, consistent response.



# CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



There are many other areas for consideration not covered within this document, but we would like to highlight a couple of last areas that we believe are critically important.

First, extraordinary times may call for extraordinary measures, but they do not excuse an agency's obligation to meet with labor groups before making major changes. We felt it was important to work collaboratively with the labor unions of our employees, and maintain open lines of communication with them as operational changes were discussed and occasionally implemented. By taking the time to discuss proposed changes and the reasons underlying them, the union leadership was able to better understand the rationale behind the changes, and could then accurately convey the intent behind the changes to their membership prior to implementation. We would caution any agency against implementing changes to working conditions or employee job assignments without fully communicating and conferring with any necessary labor groups first.

Second, we encourage agencies to break out of the silos of their specific professional discipline, and encourage collaborative work across disparate agency departments. Cross-discipline collaboration during a crisis benefits everyone. First responders in any organization are not limited to law enforcement or the fire service; they can also include personnel from utility departments, public works departments, and animal control agencies, and many others who are still serving in a field capacity while others are teleworking. It is critically important to support employees from *all* departments, and share information and procedures across departments to benefit all employees whenever possible.