SUPPORTING FIRST RESPONDERS
DURING COVID-19

We acknowledge the risks you take every single day, just by showing up to do your job. We also recognize the increased risk and burden placed upon you and your families during the COVID-19 Crisis. Your duty to serve conflicts with your own safety, and that is a stress most will never understand. We thank you for showing up day after day, while the rest of the community must remain at home. We thank you for your bravery and dedication to serving others every day, and especially during this crisis.

The intention of this kit is to provide resources to help preserve your own resilience and mental health, as well as that of your family. Additionally, it strives to highlight areas you can monitor for yourself and your peers during this crisis, in order to seek help early in coping with the unique stress you experience. Many first responders are experiencing increased levels of depression, anxiety, insomnia and stress. You are not alone in these feelings, and there are resources to help you get through them.

First – Be safe!

The best way to prevent the spread of illness is to **stay home when you are sick**. First responders have direct contact with sick and otherwise vulnerable populations. Screening staff when they report for duty reduces the risk to patients and other employees.

Every responder, every shift. Answer three simple questions when you report for duty:

Do you have a cough?

Do you have a fever?

Are you short of breath?

If you are experiencing symptoms, feel ill, or develop a fever – **stay home** and contact your healthcare provider. Make appropriate contact with your employer to plan for shift coverage, consistent with your agency COVID-19 plan.

Remember, taking precautions to protect yourself at work also helps protect your family and coworkers. If you have concerns, make sure to check in with managers, administration and other staff to address problems as a team.

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Have A Plan In Case You Become Ill

At work:
Discuss what will happen if you become ill with COVID-19 with your manager.

- Where will you isolate?
- How will you isolate from your family to protect them?
- How will you be compensated during isolation?

At home:
Find ways to get your family involved in routine and emergency activities that prevent the spread of illness in your home.

Consider a home from work routine:

- Take off shoes at entryways, especially after returning home from work.*
- Remove and launder clothes after work.*
- Immediately shower after work.*
- Teach your family best practices for hand washing and surface cleaning.

**Nationally adopted best practices from National Fire Prevention Association.*

Plan for illness in the household
Frontline workers have unique needs when it comes to planning for illness in the household. Discuss with your family what to do if you become ill, or if another family member becomes ill. By participating in the plan, your family might not feel as overwhelmed or as if they do not have power in the situation.

- Consider separate living spaces and bathrooms.
- Create a plan for childcare and pet care if you are ill.
- Create a family plan for where you will isolate (at home or away from home) if you become ill.
- Discuss the possibility for increased shifts or longer shifts during this crisis.

Download the Michigan Prepares Mobile App to help your family plan together.
Michigan.gov/MichiganPrepares

- Update your emergency contacts
- Fill out your emergency plan
- Review supply checklists
  (Tip: you don't want to have to leave your house if you become ill)

Recognize When You Need A Break

The fact that COVID-19 is human-to-human transmissible, new and relatively unknown, and potentially fatal may intensify the feelings of personal danger. It is important to understand types of stress so that you can recognize them in yourself and in others.

Burnout describes a human response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stress at work signaled by exhaustion, cynicism, and work inefficacy.

Compassion fatigue is the resulting exhaustion from constant exposure to the same stressor leading to decreased compassion or empathy for others.

Resilience is the ability to adapt successfully in the face of trauma, adversity, tragedy or significant threat. Creating a stress resilience plan helps you fight against burnout and compassion fatigue.

Create a Stress Resilience Plan

1
Self-Assess

- What are my early warning signs of excessive stress?
- What do I do currently on a daily basis for self-care?
- What do I do on a weekly basis to improve self-care?
- What do I do when my stress level is unusually high?

2
Plan for the Future

- What can I add to my self-care routine?
- How will I make time for these new strategies?
- How often should I review what I am doing?
- What challenges do I expect to have with my plan for change?
- How will I know if my changes are helping?

3
Get Support

- Who can I turn to for support with my plan?
- How often should I check in with them?
- What professional support is available for me if I need it?

Stay Healthy!

First Responders need to take care of their own health to maintain constant vigilance for their own safety. Responders must be able to stay focused on the job in the dynamic, changing crisis environment.

Pace Yourself

- Pace yourself, this pandemic is a marathon, not a sprint.
- Watch out for each other. Coworkers may be intently focused on a particular task and not notice a hazard nearby.
- Be conscious of those around you. Responders who are exhausted, stressed, or even temporarily distracted may place themselves and others at risk.
- Take frequent rest breaks. Mental fatigue, particularly over long shifts, can greatly increase emergency workers' risk of injury.
- Find a buddy - check in on one another regularly. Debrief after shifts, points out positive aspects of the shift when possible.

Prioritize Your Physical Health

- Keeping a healthy routine: Even in the uncertain times that we face today, keeping a healthy, normal routine will help curb stress.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.
- Maintain a healthy diet and exercise when you are able. Simply taking 20 minutes and going for a walk can help manage stress.
- Whenever possible, take breaks away from the work area.

Don't Ignore Your Mental Health

- Keep in touch with friends and family: A simple phone call, text message, or video chat helps to manage stress and keeps us in contact with those close and important to us.
- Limit media exposure: take some time every day to digitally unplug and get a break from all the media.
- Recognize and accept what you cannot change—the chain of command, organizational structure, waiting, equipment shortages, etc.
- Talk to people when you feel like it. You decide when you want to discuss your experience.
- Give yourself permission to feel upset or scared: you are in a difficult situation.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are normal—do not try to fight them. But if your sleep is so disrupted that it is hard to function, take time off and seek mental help.

IDENTIFYING STRESS

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Physical

Providers experiencing any of the following symptoms should seek IMMEDIATE medical attention:

- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe pain
- Symptoms of shock

If responders experience symptoms over time or if they become severe, they should seek medical attention.

- Fatigue
- Nausea/vomiting
- Dizziness
- Profuse sweating
- Thirst
- Headaches
- Visual difficulties
- Clenching of jaw
- Nonspecific aches and pains

Cognitive

If symptoms occur on the scene, responders may not be able to stay clearly focused to maintain their own safety or to help patients in distress.

Responders may experience momentary cognitive symptoms; however, if symptoms are chronic or interfere with daily activities, workers should seek medical attention. These symptoms include:

- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Poor concentration
- Poor problem solving
- Difficulty identifying familiar objects or people
- Memory problems
- Nightmares

Behavioral

As a result of a traumatic incident, providers may notice the following behavioral changes in themselves or coworkers:

- Intense anger
- Withdrawal
- Emotional outburst
- Temporary loss or increase of appetite
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Inability to rest, pacing
- Change in sexual functioning

Emotional

Strong emotions are ordinary reactions to traumatic or extraordinary situations. Providers should seek mental health support from a disaster mental health professional if distress continues for several weeks or if they interfere with daily activities. Emotional symptoms include:

- Anxiety or severe panic (rare)
- Guilt/sense of failure
- Denial
- Grief
- Fear
- Irritability
- Loss of emotional control
- Depression
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Blaming others or self

MANAGING STRESS

Recognizing stress in yourself is important. Here are some things you can do for yourself to help you manage your stress:

Talk to your peers about the stresses of the day, jobs, and other worries you share. Place an emphasis on validating one-another's concerns without focusing on the grim. Help point out positive elements of the shift or day for one another.

Seek help from support systems available in the healthcare environment. Many systems have point people or resources to help with burnout, fatigue and other concerns. Having conversations about your worries can help reduce anxiety. Check out the list of resources at the end of this document as well.

Self-care helps you stay strong in order to better help others. Self-care can be eating healthy, exercising and getting good sleep. Self-care may also include taking care of family, including children and others. Making sure you fill your own cup is just as important as pouring from it to serve others.

Stay in touch with older parents and family members you would normally visit. Connect by phone or video chat, write letters, or send supplies safely to their residence to maintain your connectedness.

Take things one day at a time - step back from the "sprint" mentality and prepare for a marathon. Remember that this pandemic will not be solved quickly so pacing will be crucial.

Take mindful minutes. Slow breaths on the top of the hour, taking time to recognize all the small things around you, acknowledging them, and letting them go. Find mindfulness techniques you enjoy and do them regularly.

National Disaster Distress Helpline

Call
1-800-
985-5990

Text
TalkWithUs
to 66746

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call
1-800-
273-8255

Text
TALK
to 741741

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Resources for First Responders

For Your Health

EAP (Employee Assistance Programs)
Ask your employer if you have an EAP for free, confidential assessments and short-term counseling for mental and emotional well-being. Many EAPs help with trauma and other emergency response situations.

Emergency Chaplain Group
Emotional and spiritual support for first-responders experiencing extraordinary human events daily.

- Phone: (855) 436 2427
- Email - Em.office@emchap.org

Code Green - https://codegreencampaign.org/

First Responders Suicide Prevention Resources Center - https://www.sprc.org/settings/first-responders

Institute for Responder Wellness - https://instituteforresponderwellness.com/

For Your Family

Childcare for Essential Workers in Michigan
Executive Order 2020-16 expanded access to childcare for essential workers responding to COVID-19. Find access to childcare: https://www.helpmegrow-mi.org/essential

CSTS (Center for Study of Traumatic Stress) – Provider and Family Resources
https://www.cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/coronavirus-and-emerging-infectious-disease-outbreaks-response

For EMS & Paramedics

- **NAEMT – EMS Mental Health Resources -** https://www.naemt.org/initiatives/ems-mental-health
- **Stress during COVID-19 amongst EMS and Paramedics-** https://www.ems1.com/mental-health/articles/self-care-is-critical-for-managing-stress-levels-in-emts-and-paramedics-responding-to-covid-19-tXvclhD64dZnqPqY/
- **EMS.gov** - https://www.ems.gov/

For Fire Fighters

- **IAFF – International Association of Fire Fighters** https://www.iaff.org/coronavirus/#resources
  - Peer support, behavioral health considerations
  - What to expect if quarantined
  - Helping your family cope with COVID-19
- **IAFF – Behavioral Health Program** https://www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/#resource-guides

For Police & Law Enforcement

- Michigan Fraternal Order of Police - http://www.mifop.com/
- Michigan Association of Police (MAPS) - https://map911.org/
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) - https://www.nami.org/find-support/law-enforcement-officers
- National Police Foundation **-** https://www.policefoundation.org/covid-19/
- Police One - https://www.policeone.com

For Public Safety Telecommunicators

- **Healthy Dispatcher**: http://www.thehealthydispatcher.com/
- **NENA wellness portal**: nena.org/wellnesscontinuum
- **911 Training Institute website**: https://www.911training.net/
- **APCO International wellness portal**: https://www.apcointl.org/resources/staffing-retention/professional-communications-human-resources-committee/prochrt-toolbox/health-and-wellness/