

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.

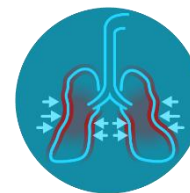
Every responder, every shift. Answer three simple questions when you report for duty:



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.

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.

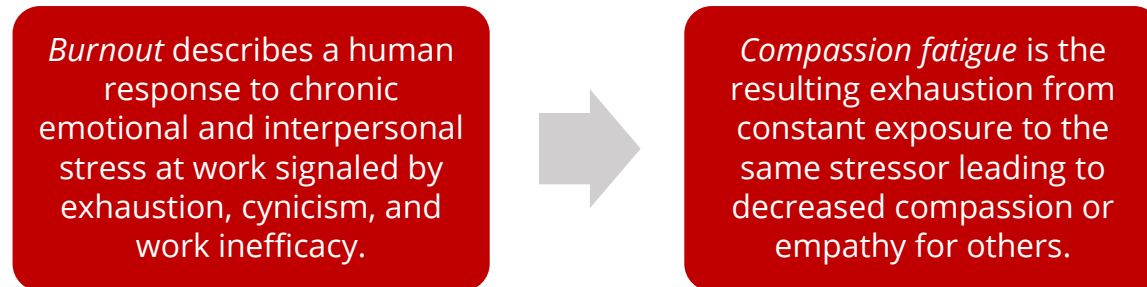
Download the Michigan Prepares Mobile App to help your family plan together.

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.



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 health 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.