COVID-19
OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

DFES
Department of Fire &
Emergency Services

INTERIM OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE (IOP) 2

Date: September 2021

Subject: Operational Response Precautions

Objective

To provide additional protective measures at incidents where a person is in isolation, suspected[1] or confirmed to have COVID-19. Types of incidents may include: Structure Fires, Bush Fires, Hazmat, Road Crash Rescue (RCR), Marine Rescue, or a Severe weather event.

Applicable to:

CFRS, VFRS, VFES, BFB, SES, MRWA.

What COMCEN will do

Communications System Officers (CSOs) will include an additional question when interrogating 000 calls where there is possible life involvement / community exposure.
CSOs will ask: "…**is any person at the location in isolation, or suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19?"** If the answer is yes, a text message will be sent via RapidAlert to crews with this advice. 132 500 SES calls will be interrogated in the same way. If the answer is yes, a comment will be added to the Request for Assistance (RFA) in WebEOC and crews will be notified.

Responding Crew Actions AT ALL INCIDENTS

As early as reasonably practicable, the Incident Controller (IC) is to confirm if there are any persons in isolation, is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19. If so, minimum infection control measures are to be implemented, as detailed later in this document. All crew are to remain at least 1.5m away from these persons. Where crew members are potentially required to come in contact (less than 1.5 m from the person) or be in the same room as these persons, enhanced infection control measures shall be implemented by the crew.

As far as reasonably practicable crews are to wash using soap and water or alcohol-based gel before entering any premises. Refer to WA Department of Health Hand Hygiene for details on how to wash your hands to best protect yourself and others.

The IC shall ensure mandatory contact tracing requirements are completed where appropriate and may request attendance of a COVID-19 Safety Advisor.

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[1] Refer to Australian Government Department of Health Coronavirus Disease 2019 – CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units for definition of suspected cases.
https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/7A8654A8CB144F5FCA2584F8001F91E2/$File/COVID-19-SoNG-v4.7.pdf

Wearing of Masks During Incidents

When the WA State Government direction is to wear masks in public, all crews are to wear a particulate filter respirator (PFR) (P2 or N95) mask at all times during an incident. PFR are to be fitted as per supplier's instructions (located on the supplied box). Exemption to wearing a PFR is where a higher level of respiratory protective equipment (e.g. BA, full face bushfire mask etc.) is required.

Where a PFR is to be worn a fit test shall be conducted prior to entering the work area as detailed in the following instructions;
- [Cupped Respirator.](#)
- [Flat Fold Respirator.](#)

Instructions are also available on the mask packaging.

Exiting Vehicles / Crew Interaction

When the WA state government direction is to wear masks in public, or the DFES COVID-19 risk level is high[2], all crews are to remain in their vehicles until required. Interaction with other crews should be avoided and should only occur where this interaction is critical to the incident outcome (e.g. road crash rescue incidents). Specifically, the following points shall be considered;

- Avoid transferring personnel between appliances/vehicles unless necessary.
- Maintain physical distancing as far as reasonably practicable.
- Conduct all briefings including those with contractors, and all other group related discussions outdoors where possible. Consider using phones or other electronic devices.
- Only the crew leader is to check into an incident and attend briefings.
- Crews to remain in vehicles until tasked.

Responding to Vessels, Airports, and Supervised Quarantine, Health, Aged and Child Care Facilities

When responding to an incident onboard a vessel, within an airport (including onboard aircrafts), or at a Supervised Quarantine, Health, Aged or Child Care Facility, crews are to implement Minimum Infection Control Measures, outlined later in this document.

Failure to follow these actions, especially for vessels, may result in crew members being considered exposed to COVID, requiring crew members to self-isolate.

Refer to Dept. of Health [Exposed on-board workers fact sheet](#).

Considerations when isolated, suspected or confirmed COVID persons are present

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[2] DFES COVID-19 risk level will be listed in COVID-19 Update communications

When crews are likely to interact with a person in isolation, is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, the IC shall consider alternative options before committing crews. Options include, but not limited to;

- investigating through windows.
- use of mobile phone video by person in isolation.
- verbal interrogation with person in isolation.

When crews are required to interact with the person, the IC shall keep exposed crews to a minimum, and have exposed crews isolated until PPE is doffed as detailed later in this document.

The IC is to notify the COVID Safety Advisor via the ComCen of any incident where any persons are in isolation or are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19.

PPE Requirements

PPE as detailed in SOP 3.2.1 – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shall be worn for the incident type you are attending. Minimum or enhanced infection control measures, outlined later in this document, shall be used in addition to normal PPE requirements.

Where the PPE required to meet minimum or enhanced infection control measure create a hazard at the incident, such as wearing nitrile gloves at a fire or a plastic type fluid repellent gown at a road crash rescue (RCR), these specific items of PPE may be dispensed with.

Minimum Infection Control Measures

Where crews are at an incident where persons are in isolation, or are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, the following infection control measures are to be undertaken;

- Wash hands using soap and water or alcohol-based gel as per the Dept. of Health Hand Hygiene guide.
- Wearing a PFR and protective eyewear, and nitrile gloves. Level 2 gloves offer the same level of protection against COVID-19 as nitrile gloves.
- Maintain a minimum distance of at least 1.5 metres between yourself and the person.
- Avoid making unnecessary contact with surfaces and items.

Enhanced Infection Control Measures

Where crews are at an incident where persons are in isolation, or are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, AND you are required to come in contact with them, the following infection control measures are to be undertaken;

- Wash hands using soap and water or alcohol-based gel as per the Dept. of Health Hand Hygiene guide.
- Wear a PFR and protective eyewear, and nitrile gloves. Level 2 gloves offer the same level of protection against COVID-19 as nitrile gloves
- Wear a fluid repellent gown. Level two over trousers and tunics offer this level of protection.
- Where possible maintain a minimum distance of at least 1.5 metres between yourself and the person.
- Avoid making unnecessary contact with surfaces and items.

- Person to be given a surgical mask (P2/N95 where a surgical mask is unavailable). Person is to wash hands or use alcohol based hand rub before and after donning mask where possible.
- Use a CPR mask or oxy-viva if administering CPR.
- Treat body fluids as potentially infectious.

Doffing PPE

Where crews were required to implement minimum or enhanced infection control measures, the following steps shall be adhered to when doffing PPE;

- Remove nitrile gloves and immediately place in a waste plastic bag.
- Wash hands using soap and water or alcohol-based gel as per the Dept. of Health Hand Hygiene guide.
- Remove fluid repellent gown (when worn), by only touching inside of gown. Roll into a bundle and place in the waste plastic bag; or
- If wearing Level 2 PPE, remove tunic and over trousers without touching the outside of the garment. Place PPE into decontamination bag for laundering. Refer to SOP 3.3.5 – Exposure to Biological Hazards for more information.
- Wash hands using soap and water or alcohol-based gel as per the Dept. of Health Hand Hygiene guide.
- Remove eyewear clean (where required) and then disinfect with alcohol wipes.
- Perform hand hygiene
- Remove mask by only handling ties and immediately place in the waste plastic bag.
- Wash hands using soap and water or alcohol-based gel as per the Dept. of Health Hand Hygiene guide.
- Waste bag to be tied and placed into a second waste bag. Tie the second bag and discard immediately with normal waste.

Disinfecting Equipment

Any equipment, including reusable items of PPE (such as helmets) that may have been used in the vicinity of a person in isolation, or who was suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 shall be isolated for a minimum of 72 hours, after which the time shall be cleaned as per NUCOM or manufactures instructions. Where items are required to maintain operational capability, refer to IOP 9 – Cleaning and Disinfection of Vehicles and Equipment, notifying the IRT (via ComCen).

IOP 9 – Cleaning and Disinfection of Vehicles and Equipment

Post Incident Actions AT ALL INCIDENTS

Crews are to wash hands using soap and water or alcohol-based gel as per Dept. of Health Hand Hygiene before entering the appliances.

Where it is suspected exposure to COVID-19 has occurred decontaminate PPE as per standard procedures. Refer to SOP 3.3.5 – Exposure to Biological Hazards.

Reporting Requirements

Any exposure or potential exposure should be reported by;

- the Incident Reporting System (IRS) using the COVID-19 field

- Online hazard report system (staff)
- Safety hazard and incident report form (volunteers).

Additional Information

The Western Australia Department of Health publish a range of information sheets to support COVID-19 operations. Refer to the links below for more information;

- General COVID-19 information
- Hand Hygiene
- Donning and Doffing PPE (without gown)
- Donning and Doffing PPE (with gown)
- Infection Prevention and Control in Western Australian Healthcare Facilities
- Infection prevention and control management of international maritime crew medical transfer

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Document History

1.0	Mar 20	Initial release
1.1	February 2021	Inclusion of guidance for wearing masks, exiting vehicles and crew interactions.
1.2	April 2021	Inclusion of guidance regarding mandatory contact tracing requirements and request for COVID-19 Safety Advisor. Context provided for situations where COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed.
1.3	May 2021	Add new section "Responding to Vessels, Airports, and Supervised Quarantine, Health, Aged and Child Care Facilities". Expanded content of "Post Incident Actions".
1.3 Rev 0.2	Aug 2021	Changes following review of document by Dept. of Health, considering latest knowledge on COVID-19
1.4	September 2021	CSO query to 000 callers now includes 'suspected' and 'in isolation'. Included additional infection control measure when responding to all incidents. Included instructions for fit testing when wearing masks during incidents. Included additional guidance when responding to vessels and link to Dept. of Health fact sheet. Exposed personnel may be required to self-isolate. Inclusion and clarification of considerations when responding to incidents involving persons in isolation, suspected or confirmed infected. New guidance includes PPE requirements, minimum and enhanced infection control measures, doffing PPE, and disinfection of equipment. Reporting requirements now include a hazard safety report. Inclusion of links to additional information.