



Joint Statement Regarding PPE Compliance Among First Responders

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Augusta, ME – Maine Emergency Medical Services (Maine EMS), Maine Fire Chiefs Association (MFCA), Maine Ambulance Association (MAA), and the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) believe that the safety of first responders, their families, and the communities that they serve are of the utmost importance when developing policies related to personal protective equipment (PPE). As a member of the healthcare team, responding on the frontlines, first responders are at an increased risk of exposure to COVID-19.

We urge all first responding organizations to exercise vigilance in instituting universal masking policies for interactions with all patients no matter their original complaint or status of the Emerging Infectious Disease Screening (EIDS) Tool (i.e. U21 positive/negative/inconclusive). These policies should include at least a surgical mask or higher, gloves, and eye protection. Additionally, we ask that organizations strongly emphasize the importance of good clinical screening, evaluation, and decision-making regarding patients during the initial scene size-up to determine if additional PPE may be necessary. Individuals who meet the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC) most up-to-date signs and symptoms, those patients refusing to be masked, patients undergoing an aerosol generating procedure, and those in cardiac arrest require that those caring for them don PPE that confers protection against aerosol particles. This protection, airborne precautions, includes an N95 respirator (equivalent or higher), gloves, gown, and eye protection.

In order to protect the public safety workforce in the State of Maine, we also strongly recommend that all first responder organizations institute policies that require masking or face coverings when people are in the common areas of barracks, fire stations, EMS bases, and other similar structures or out in the public. Instituting these policies may be able to drastically reduce the spread of this virus and may have prevented incidents experienced in Aroostook County. It is imperative that, as public safety professionals, we exhibit best practices that have been proven by scientists to reduce and mitigate the spread of this dangerous virus.

Lastly, we would also like to stress the vital importance of mental health during this time. Encouraging members to reach out to resources that are available including the regional EMS critical stress management (CISM) teams, local counselors and mental health professionals, and the Maine Front Line Warm Line (available between 08:00 and 20:00 by calling 207.221.8196).

Being proactive and providing access to resources and treatment during these tumultuous times is equally critical to ensuring the safety and overall well-being of our teams.

Note: This joint statement reflects the position of multiple regulatory and non-regulatory organizations on PPE compliance among first responders. Maine EMS requires that all licensed EMS clinicians don appropriate PPE in compliance with the most current *Operational Bulletin: Universal Masking for EMS Clinicians (2020-06-16-01U1)*. A copy can be found online at <https://www.maine.gov/ems/sites/maine.gov.ems/files/inline-files/20200629-Operational-Bulletin-Regarding-Universal-Masking-Update.pdf>.