INTERPOL

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

GUIDELINES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

24 March 2020

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The coronavirus outbreak that began in late 2019 (COVID-19) has evolved so rapidly and globally that it has been qualified as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). The rapid spread of the disease worldwide, and uncertainties as to its evolution, demand a global response in which law enforcement services play a crucial role in contributing to the effort to control the disease, promoting safer communities, and fighting criminals who see the outbreak as an opportunity to increase or diversify their activities.

INTERPOL, in accordance with the WHO's recommendations, is urging its member countries to follow the guidelines contained in this document, in order to enhance the safety and effectiveness of law enforcement support in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Disclaimer: These guidelines are meant to be considered by law enforcement agencies as part of a response strategy to the outbreak and in close cooperation with national public health authorities. Their purpose is to supplement rather than replace national guidelines. All measures taken by national law enforcement authorities should be in conformity with the applicable national legislation and international obligations.

1.

COVID-19: CURRENT POSITION

1.1 SYMPTOMS

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are flu-like symptoms: fever, tiredness, dry cough, possibly aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Most people recover from the disease without needing special treatment.

1.2 VULNERABLE GROUPS

Particular attention should be paid to older people, and those with underlying medical problems such as high blood pressure, respiratory or heart problems, diabetes, or deficient immune systems. These people are more likely to develop serious illness.

1.3 TRANSMISSION MODE

Disease transmission is most likely to occur through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread from person to person when somebody with COVID-19 coughs or exhales. Other people catch COVID-19 by touching objects or surfaces contaminated by these droplets, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

To date, there is no substantive evidence that companion animals can spread the disease.

Watch video ▶

COUGH / EXHALE

CONTAMINATED OBJECTS AND SURFACES

PHYSICAL CONTACT

TOUCHING EYES, NOSE OR MOUTH

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2.

RECOMMENDED PROTECTION MEASURES

There is currently no vaccine nor specific treatment against COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness and contamination spread is to **avoid exposure to the virus.**

Practise **proper and frequent handwashing** or use hand-sanitizer.

Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.

Apply social distancing measures: the WHO recommendation is to stay at least one metre away from each other (some national guidelines recommend more).

Clean or decontaminate your work equipment if you think you have been in contact with a COVID-19 patient and self-monitor for signs of illness.

Considering the transmission mode of the disease and when available, law enforcement officers in contact with the general population are recommended to **wear masks and gloves.**

Watch video ▶

Important: personal protective equipment (PPE) protects you and others only if you know how to use and dispose of it properly.

More information ▶

Seek medical advice if you show any symptom, as per your national public health recommendations.

PROTECTING PARTNERS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS AFTER YOUR SHIFT

Law enforcement duties can potentially expose officers to COVID-19. Before coming back into direct contact with their loved ones, law enforcement officers should maintain social distancing measures and follow these steps when returning home:

- **Clean or decontaminate your work equipment, including shoes, avoiding the spread of particles/dust;**
- **Take off duty clothes and wash them with laundry soap as soon as feasible. Handle, transport and wash them in way that limits exposure to skin, eyes, environment and other clean clothes (avoid shaking clothes);**
- **Take a shower or wash exposed skin with soap and water;**
- **Self-monitor for signs of illness.**

3. LAW ENFORCEMENT DUTIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Many countries are affected by an increasing number of reported COVID-19 cases, requiring governments to take strict measures in order to protect the population and to prevent contamination spread. The WHO and national public health practitioners are working around the clock to save lives.

Law enforcement agencies have a key role to play in both supporting the implementation of public health measures to contain the outbreak and in preventing specific criminal activities arising from this context.

These guidelines are intended to raise awareness among law enforcement agencies and should be managed in accordance with national legislation, in line with national policing best practice and in coordination with national public health authorities.

3.1 SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

Based on the situation faced at national level, and as per your interagency COVID-19 response strategy, law enforcement may be involved in supporting public health control measures in a number of tasks. All protection measures mentioned earlier apply to the following tasks:

3.1.1 RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENTS

- **At border crossing points;**
- **In areas under lockdown.**

Recommendations:

- Wear PPE (when available and recommended by public health authorities);
- Apply social distancing measures:
  the WHO recommendation is to stay at least one metre away from each other (some national guidelines recommend more).
- Avoid or limit direct contact with documents;
- When dealing with uncooperative individuals, limit contact and practise hand hygiene.

3.1.2 PUBLIC ORDER

- **Management of containment areas and gatherings of people, for instance at pharmacies and shops. New partnerships between private security firms, law enforcement and the military should be considered.**
- **Cordoning critical infrastructures such as hospitals.**
- **Jail breaks (such cases have already been reported).**
- **Population unrest/riots (over restrictions, food concerns, control measures, etc.).**

Recommendations:

- Wear PPE (when available), including gloves, eye protection and disposable face mask, should you be in close contact with a crowd;
- Apply social distancing measures: the WHO recommendation is to stay at least one metre away from each other (some national guidelines recommend more);
- Wash your hands and face as soon as possible;
- Clean you equipment and work environment after your intervention;
- Pay particular attention to maintaining public order inside and outside prisons. Communication over preventive and control measures concerning detention centres could play a role in maintaining order.

3.1.3 CONTACT TRACING

- **When a patient shows symptoms or is tested positive to COVID-19, public health practitioners will identify people who have been in potential contact with the affected patient through contact tracing.**

Recommendation:

- Use proportionate police investigation resources to trace individuals who have been in contact with COVID-19 patients. Such activities should be conducted in strict compliance with national legislation and with due respect to individual rights.

3.1.4 SECURING THE DELIVERY OF EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

- **In a crisis context, emergency supplies are delivered to healthcare centres (medical equipment, PPE etc.)**

Recommendation:

- Consider using either private security, military or law enforcement escorts to prevent thefts or attacks in order to secure these deliveries.

3.1.5 PUBLIC MESSAGING

- **Law enforcement can play an active role in relaying national public health measures to the population, in coordination with government agencies and health agencies.**

Recommendations:

- Stay up-to-date on the evolution of national public health control measures;
- Relay information about preparedness measures and national public advice to the public;
- Encourage interagency coordination to ensure consistent messages to the public;
- Promote rumour reporting through proper mechanisms to combat fake news and work with private industry to take down fake messages.

3.2 PREVENTING SPECIFIC ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES ARISING FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS CONTEXT

An increased illegal intent in the following crime areas requires heightened attention from the law enforcement community.

3.2.1 INTIMIDATION AND DELIBERATE CONTAMINATION SPREAD

Law enforcement agencies should consider increasing their monitoring based on the following modus operandi, which refer to potential deliberate acts that could result in a risk of contamination spread.

- **Recent cases have shown examples of individuals spitting and coughing at law enforcement officers' faces to intimidate them. This could represent a risk if these individuals are infected by COVID-19.**
- **Certain infected individuals may deliberately move from affected areas to non-affected areas, despite their medical condition and potential travel restrictions in place.**
- **Instances of individuals claiming to sell contaminated samples of body fluids online have been reported.**

Recommendations

Recommendations:

- Take particular care when approaching uncooperative individuals and wear PPE (when available).
- Border police officers should report any individual showing symptoms at border crossing points.
- Specialized investigators in cybercrime or counter-terrorism should pay particular attention to online market places.
- Law enforcement officers involved in public order or in charge of protecting prominent public figures should be made aware of these risks.

3.2.2 FAKE AND COUNTERFEIT MEDICAL PRODUCTS

The COVID-19 pandemic has offered an opportunity for fast cash, as predatory criminals take advantage of the high market demand for personal protection and hygiene products. The results of Operation Pangea, conducted by INTERPOL with enforcement partners in March 2020, have shown an increase in fake or counterfeit medical items available on the market, including:

- **Disposable surgical masks**
- **Hand sanitizers**
- **Antiviral and antimalarial medication**
- **Vaccines**
- **COVID-19 test kits**

Recommendations:

- **Law enforcement agencies should pay particular attention to the above list of fake or counterfeit items.**
- **Inform the general public about false or misleading online advertisements related to these products.**
- **National reporting hotlines may identify such scams at an early stage.**

3.2.3 FRAUD AND SCAM SCHEMES

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, various fraud and scam schemes taking advantage of the crisis situation have been reported. These schemes can be categorized as follow:

- **Online fraud:** scammers create and set up fraudulent websites, e-commerce platforms, social media accounts and emails claiming to sell and deliver medical products. In some cases, they use the names of prominent companies involved in the production and distribution of these items. Victims are then asked to pay via bank transfer.

- **Telephone fraud:** there have been reports of emerging telecom fraud and telephone deception related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A caller who pretends to be a relative currently being treated at hospital contacts the elderly by phone. Victims are then asked to pay for the cost of the medical treatment by transferring money or by paying cash to fake public health representatives.

- **Phishing:** letters or emails related to the pandemic are sent by criminals claiming to be health authorities, with the aim of tricking victims into connecting to a specific webpage and to login with their real email address and password. Scammers then use their credentials to access sensitive information and potentially to steal funds.

Recommendations:

- Investigative agencies should be made aware of these practices, which are likely to increase.
- Law enforcement should relay these emerging modus operandi to the population through public messaging.
- The INTERPOL Financial Crimes Unit (FCU) is assisting member countries to intercept money sent by the victims of fraud-related crimes. Please contact the FCU via your National Central Bureau for more details.

3.2.4 CYBERCRIME

There has been a marked increase in cybercrime incidents being tailored around aspects of the coronavirus to target organizations and unsuspecting victims.

- **There is an increase in the detected number of malware and ransomware campaigns that are using the COVID-19 pandemic to infect the computer systems of individuals and organizations. Cyber criminals have evolved their tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) to exploit vulnerabilities due to the current situation.**

- **Critical infrastructure, such as hospital systems, has been the focus of cyberattacks and the deployment of ransomware.**

- **With so many more people working from home, this can present additional risks and vulnerabilities, which cyber criminals may seek to exploit.**

- **Law enforcement and cybercrime agencies are encouraged to follow the advice below and share it with the communities they police.**

Recommendations

Recommendations:

- Avoid opening suspicious emails and clicking on links in unrecognized emails and attachments;
- Back up online and offline files regularly and securely;
- Use strong passwords;
- Keep your software updated, including anti-virus software;
- Manage your social media settings and review your privacy and security settings;
- Strengthen your home network;
- Educate your family, especially your children, about how to stay safe online;
- If you become a victim, ensure you alert your local police.

4.

INTERPOL'S GLOBAL SUPPORT

COVID-19 presents a global challenge not just for law enforcement, but for society as a whole.

The pandemic, like crime, knows no borders and our responses, individually and together, will be essential in lessening its impact today and in the future.

The reasons INTERPOL was created nearly 100 years ago are even more valid today. We will continue to provide whatever support is necessary to our member countries, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Our secure global network will ensure vital policing information continues to get where it is needed.

Our specialist crime units will ensure the latest trends and threats related to COVID-19 will be shared.

Our Command and Coordination Centre will ensure your calls for assistance are answered.

INTERPOL remains committed to working with you to make the world a safer place.

4.1 HOW TO CONTACT THE COMMAND AND COORDINATION CENTRE

- **Email: os-ccc@interpol.int**
- **Phone: +33 (0)4 72 44 76 76**
- **NCB Dashboard: http://i247.ip/i247/**

These contact details are for use by NCBs and authorized law enforcement officers only.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Learn more about the origin of COVID-19, symptoms and transmission mode

  Video ▶

- Rational use of personal protective equipment for COVID-19

  More information ▶

- COVID-19 advice for the public: questions and answers (available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic)

  More information ▶

INTERPOL

ABOUT INTERPOL

INTERPOL's role is to enable police in our 194 member countries to work together to fight transnational crime and make the world a safer place. We maintain global databases containing police information on criminals and crime, and we provide operational and forensic support, analysis services and training. These policing capabilities are delivered worldwide and support three global programmes: counter-terrorism, cybercrime, and organized and emerging crime.

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