

**Maine Association for Search and Rescue
COVID-19 Response Procedure - Revision 1
(Previously “Pandemic Response Procedure”)
April 22, 2020**

The MASAR Board of Directors wants to keep teams informed on the latest COVID-19 response protocols and recommendations as they relate to Search and Rescue (SAR) operations at this time.

Background:

There are several distinct problems of back-country SAR during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

- The evaluation, treatment, packaging, and evacuation of a patient with possible COVID-19 infection.
- The close proximity of the rescue team to each other in the evacuation of any victim and the violation of social distancing it represents.
- The limited options for hygiene, changing out contaminated clothing, and rapidly obtaining extra supplies.
- Rescues often take several hours, which raises the need for rescuers to adjust their own clothing, take food and liquids, and empty their bladders.

COVID 19 spreads primarily by larger droplets and direct contact, with a possible contribution of fine suspended airborne particles. In outdoor situations we do not need to be as concerned about "airborne" contagion as much as providers would in a small confined space such as an ambulance. There is, however, ample opportunity for transmission due to close contact between rescuers. Secretions including cough and sneeze particles, and from increased respiratory effort due to exertion, could be transmitted from one rescuer to another, or by the virus settling on surfaces.

Essential Services Designation

SAR volunteers are not specifically named in the Maine State list of essential businesses/services (“*Executive Order 19: An Order Regarding Essential Businesses and Operations*” dated 24MAR 2020) or the US Department of Homeland Security “*Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure*” (dated 19MAR 2020) referenced therein¹. Therefore, official designation as an “essential service” was requested and received, and is attached at the end of this document.

Response Expectations

The Board understands that members may or may not want to respond at this time and we support your decision. Before you respond to a search or rescue (hereafter referred to as a

“mission”), please make sure to carefully consider your current health and recent travel in your calculations about whether to respond.

If you are feeling unwell in any way, but in particular, **if you have any of the following concerning symptoms, you should not respond to a mission:**

- FEVER - Measured
- NEW/INCREASED COUGH
- NEW MUSCLE ACHES OR JOINT PAIN/STIFFNESS not attributable to another medical condition or injury
- SORE THROAT
- SHORTNESS OF BREATH
- ABDOMINAL PAIN and/or DIARRHEA
- INCREASED FATIGUE
- DECREASED SENSE OF TASTE OR SMELL

Additionally, please carefully consider whether it is appropriate to take part in a mission if:

- You have (or are caring for someone who has) a pre-existing medical history including but not limited to immune system disorder, cardiac or respiratory medical history,
- You are over the age of 55,
- You recently had contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or
- You have recently been to an area experiencing a high number of COVID-19 cases (an exception to this would be a medical health worker utilizing appropriate PPE in their work environment).

Physical Distancing Procedures:

- Physical distancing guidelines dictate SAR personnel should maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from any other individual who does not live in their household - rescuer, patient, etc. - at all times, with the exception of a litter carry or other unavoidable patient care scenario.
- SAR personnel may not carpool with anyone who does not live in their household, including from the Command Post (CP) area to the staging area.
 - In rare cases, exceptions may be made to this guideline if the mission requires volunteers to be transported by some means other than their personal vehicles. In such situations, the benefits of alternate transportation will be weighed against the risk of disease transmission. Personnel will don appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and efforts will be made to maximize personal space and ventilation, while also minimizing the number of people exposed.
- Do not enter the CP itself, whether it is indoors or inside the Maine Warden Service Command Vehicle.

- At CP, with the possible exception of check-in/check-out, stay near/in your vehicle. Staff will come to you as necessary; communicate with them via radio.
- The check-in sheet will be modified to include a license plate number and vehicle description.
- If the Dirigo SAR check-in trailer is present:
 - ONLY members of Dirigo SAR or the Agency Having Jurisdiction will be allowed in the check-in trailer.
 - Only TWO individuals will be allowed in the check-in trailer at any one time, and those two members will follow physical distancing guidelines.
 - Check-ins will be accomplished under a tent canopy outside of the trailer.
 - Only TWO individuals will be allowed under the canopy at a time; clipboards will be passed around at arms' length.
 - Personnel should either use hand sanitizer after handling the clipboard/pen.
- If the check-in area is located indoors:
 - Only ONE individual will be allowed into the indoor check-in area at a time; clipboards will be brought outside and passed around at arms' length.
 - Personnel should either use hand sanitizer after handling the clipboard/pen.
- Search teams should be no more than five (5) people. Team members should verbalize concern if you are assigned to a larger team.
- Rescuers should endeavor to maintain six (6) foot separation while meeting, gearing up, and conducting the search or rescue.
- Rescuers should bring a second set of clothes and a garbage bag and change clothes prior to getting in their vehicles to leave and return home.
- All persons should bring their own food, water, and clothing on the mission, and not share with others unless critical.
- When you return to the Command Post (CP) area after your assignment, use your radio to announce your arrival back and where you are located in the staging area. An operations person will find you to question you and get your GPS, or Command will give you further instructions.
- No more than five (5) SAR personnel will be allowed into the food area at a time, and personnel should eat away from the food area, with consideration of not contaminating their vehicles.
- Rescuers will change clothes in parking lot and bag clothes used on SAR and launder.
- At some point clean and disinfect the inside of your vehicle's steering wheel, knobs, handles inside and out, as well as your cell phones, radios, wallets, credit cards, and other personal items as appropriate.

Personal Protective Equipment:

PPE is essential to your safety when responding. Minimal PPE requirements at this time include: nitrile medical gloves, wrap-around eye protection (goggles / ski goggles preferred) and a simple facemask (see next page) or surgical mask.

An N-95 mask would be optimal for patients for whom you have a high suspicion of COVID-19 if you are responsible for direct patient care. Simple mask is a commercially available dust mask, and other similar types of commercially distributed masks. Cloth masks, homemade masks, scarves, and bandanas do not meet the requirement in this guideline.

- All personal protective gear should be worn with ANY indication of risk.
- All rescuers should endeavor to pre-hydrate, eat, and void prior to donning PPE.
- Rescuers should put on a simple mask to both protect themselves and decrease their spreading of personal germs to others, followed by hand hygiene with alcohol. This should be performed at the truck prior to handling gear.
- If a rescuer is using their own N-95 mask, it is the responsibility of the rescuer to have the N-95 mask fit-tested.
- For litter carries, the patient must be given a simple face mask, and wraparound eye protection. If available, use a head shield on the litter. SAR personnel located near the patient's head and face should make every effort not to lean over the patient's face. Patients should be placed in a hypothermia wrap or Burrito wrap to limit rescuer exposure, and the litter wiped down prior to being handled by litter team.
- Rescuers lacking appropriate PPE should not take part in a rescue.

Identifying Risk Factors/Levels:

"Risk Factors" are risk factors for active disease, not for transmissible disease (except for immunosuppression). Anyone with these symptoms who requires rescue even for "unrelated" orthopedic injury should be treated as a potential risk for rescuers, and treated with full PPE by rescuers.

- In the event that responding MASAR members make the initial patient contact, the **one highest medically qualified** MASAR member should approach the patient; other members should maintain at least 6 feet of distance from the patient and other rescuers.
- If MASAR personnel are *not* the initial contact point with the patient, the highest medically qualified MASAR member will speak with whomever has been with the patient, to attempt to determine risk levels without exposure to the patient.
- Risk determination should include answers to the following:
 - Has the patient recently had close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19?
 - Has the patient recently experienced, or is he/she experiencing, the following symptoms:
 - FEVER - Measured
 - NEW/INCREASED COUGH

- NEW MUSCLE ACHES or JOINT PAIN/STIFFNESS not attributable to another medical condition or injury
 - SORE THROAT
 - SHORTNESS OF BREATH
 - ABDOMINAL PAIN and/or DIARRHEA
 - INCREASED FATIGUE
 - DECREASED SENSE OF TASTE OR SMELL
- Once that MASAR member has received a report of patient condition, they will advise other team members of risk and all members will put on PPE as necessary.
- Minimal PPE requirements at this time include:
 - Nitrile medical gloves,
 - Wrap-around eye protection (goggles, ski goggles preferred)
 - Simple facemask or surgical mask. Surgical masks should be upgraded to N-95 if the patient has respiratory symptoms. Cloth masks, homemade mask or bandanas do not meet the requirement in this guideline.

In Case Of Exposure:

- If you are exposed to someone whom you have a high suspicion of COVID-19, known as a person under investigation (PUI), when responding to a mission, or you have a lapse in PPE with a patient of high suspicion, you should immediately notify your team leader, team President, or other designated representative. At that point, your team leadership will notify MASAR Duty Officer (DO), who then in turn notify the Agency Having Jurisdiction (AHJ).
- MEMBERS NEED TO CONTACT THEIR PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER TO REQUEST A TEST. Make sure you say “I am a First Responder.”
- Once you arrive home, take a shower, use physical distancing with all your family members, and notify your healthcare provider by phone.
- MASAR will make every effort to discover the status of a PUI for SAR members involved in the rescue.
- Rescuers should monitor their own temperature twice a day (AM and PM) for 14 days.
- Until further guidance is received to the contrary, we will treat exposure as a Workers’ Compensation Insurance issue.

How To Care For Personal Equipment:

All equipment used on a mission should be decontaminated post-mission. Decontamination procedures require 30 minutes of air dry time after cleaning.

- It is essential to clean/disinfect equipment - particularly things that many people touch: i.e. litter, wheel, gear tubs, RR gear, clipboards and pens, radios, vehicle door latches, etc.

- Ropes and soft gear (sling) that has had direct contact with the patient will also be cleaned.
- Rescuers will remove their outermost layer of clothes used on SAR in the parking lot and bag clothes for laundering. This includes work gloves. Do not shake dirty laundry in order to minimize the possibility of dispersing the virus through the air. Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the hot water setting for the items and dry items completely.
- Personal rescue gear should be wiped down with either disinfectant cloths (make sure to follow manufacturer instructions for wet contact time) or by washing with hot soapy water or hard goods can be disinfected by following the CDC guidelines by using at least a 1000ppm bleach solution (see preparation info below) with a contact time of at least 1 minute but no more than 10min. All equipment that comes in contact with the bleach solution should be rinsed very thoroughly with clean water to prevent the degradation of some materials.
- Prepare a bleach solution by mixing 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) unexpired regular strength bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons of bleach per quart of water.

Trainings and Meetings:

- Teams are encouraged to use online video conference format for trainings if possible.
- Until further guidance is received to the contrary, training sessions attended by fewer than 10 members of MASAR teams in an outdoor setting are assumed to be acceptable, as long as physical distance and PPE guidelines are followed.
- Send an email to Mike Sawyer prior to each training session, noting the date/time, location, and names of those expected to attend. Send another email afterward confirming that the training session occurred, and the names of those who attended.
- Do not allow any non-members, or anyone from out of state/country, to attend a training.
- **One day prior to the training session**, ask all expected attendees the following questions (any yes answers disqualifies the member from attending):
 - Have you recently experienced, or are they experiencing the following symptoms:
 - FEVER - Measured
 - NEW/INCREASED COUGH
 - NEW MUSCLE ACHES or JOINT PAIN/STIFFNESS not attributable to another medical condition or injury
 - SORE THROAT
 - SHORTNESS OF BREATH
 - ABDOMINAL PAIN and/or DIARRHEA
 - INCREASED FATIGUE
 - DECREASED SENSE OF TASTE OR SMELL
 - Recent close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or who has recently been showing these symptoms?

- Traveled to an area experiencing a high number of COVID-19 cases within the last 2 weeks? (An exception to this would be a medical health worker utilizing appropriate PPE in their work environment.)
- The 2020 MASAR Conference has been rescheduled to May 14-16, 2021.
- Until further guidance is received to the contrary, the June 7 MASAR meeting is currently still scheduled, but please watch for updates. It is possible that it may shift to a video conference format or be postponed.

MASAR COVID-19 SYNOPSIS

SEE MASAR COVID-19 RESPONSE PROCEDURE 4/2020 FOR FULL DETAILS

DO NOT RESPOND IF: If you are feeling unwell in any way, but in particular, **anyone with any of the following concerning symptoms should not attend a rescue:**

- FEVER – Measured
- NEW/INCREASED COUGH
- NEW MUSCLE ACHES OR JOINT PAIN/STIFFNESS not attributable to another medical condition or injury
- SORE THROAT
- SHORTNESS OF BREATH
- ABDOMINAL PAIN and/or DIARRHEA
- INCREASED FATIGUE
- DECREASED SENSE OF TASTE OR SMELL

- If you have recently been to an area experiencing a high number of COVID-19 cases. An exception to this would be a medical health worker utilizing appropriate PPE in their work environment.
- If you have a pre-existing medical history including immune system disorder, cardiac or respiratory medical history, or you are over the age of 55

Personal Protective Equipment:

PPE requirements include: nitrile medical gloves, wrap-around eye protection (goggles/ ski goggles preferred) and a simple facemask or surgical mask.

- An N-95 mask would be optimal for patients for whom you have a high suspicion of COVID -19. If a rescuer is using their own N-95 mask, it is the responsibility of the rescuer to have the N-95 mask fit tested.
- If you are responsible for direct patient care. A Simple facemask or surgical mask will be used. A simple mask is a commercially available dust mask, and other similar types of commercially distributed masks. However, cloth masks, homemade mask or bandanas do not meet the requirement in this guideline.
- All personal protective gear should be worn with ANY indication of risk.
- All rescuers should endeavor to pre-hydrate and eat, as well as void prior to donning PPE.
- Rescuers should put on a simple mask, followed by hand hygiene with alcohol. This should be performed at the truck prior to handling gear.
- For litter carries, the patient must be given a simple face mask, and wraparound eye protection. If available, use a head shield on the litter.
- Patients should be placed in a hypothermia wrap or Burrito wrap to limit rescuer exposure, and the litter wiped down prior to being handled by litter team.
- Rescuers lacking appropriate PPE should not take part in a rescue.

Physical Distancing Procedures

- Physical distancing guidelines dictate SAR personnel should maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from any other individual
- SAR personnel may not carpool individual who does not live in their household
- Exceptions may be made to this guideline if the mission requires volunteers to be transported by some means other than their personal vehicles.
- Search teams should be no more than five (5) people.
- Do not enter the CP, wait for directions near/in your vehicle. Only ONE individual will be allowed into the indoor check-in area at a time
- Dirigo SAR check-in trailer - ONLY members of Dirigo SAR or the Agency Having Jurisdiction will be allowed in the check-in trailer.
- Only TWO individuals will be allowed in the check-in trailer at any one time,
- No more than five (5) SAR personnel will be allowed into the food area at a time.
- Rescuers should bring a second set of clothes and a garbage bag and change clothes prior to getting in their vehicles to leave and return home.

Identifying Risk Factors/Levels: "Risk Factors" are risk factors for active disease, not for transmissible disease (except for immunosuppression). Anyone with these symptoms who requires rescue even for "unrelated" orthopedic injury should be treated as a potential risk for rescuers, and treated with full PPE by rescuers.

- Initial patient contact, the **one highest medically qualified** MASAR member should approach the patient, to determine risk levels. Other members should maintain at least 6 feet of distance from the patient and other rescuers.
- If MASAR personnel are *not* the initial contact point with the patient, the highest medically qualified MASAR member will speak with whomever has been with the patient, to attempt to determine risk levels without exposure to the patient.
- Risk determination should include answers to the following: Has the patient recently had close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19? Has the patient recently experienced, or is he/she experiencing, the symptoms listed in ***DO NOT RESPOND IF BOX*** above.
- Once that MASAR member has received a report of patient condition, they will advise other team members of risk and all members will put on PPE as necessary.



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

HEATHER JOHNSON
COMMISSIONER

April 2, 2020

Maine Association for Search And Rescue
Sharon Kenney
Statewide Residence and Response
Any Town ME 04401

Dear Sharon,

We have received your designation request.

After careful review, it has been determined that Maine Association for Search And Rescue does align with the intent of and interests served by the Governor's Executive Order 28FY19/20 and therefore is considered an essential business within the meaning of the Order.

We strongly urge you to implement physical distancing measures and provide employees with the resources that they need to maintain a safe work environment. The best thing that Maine people can do to protect their health is to practice physical distancing and take the same preventive measures that avoid catching a cold. Wash your hands often for 20 seconds. Cover coughs and sneezes. Stay home if you are sick. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, shortness of breath, and lower respiratory distress. Call ahead to a health care professional if you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness.

I would like to thank you for the hard work you are doing to support the needs of our state and the needs of your employees. Although these are challenging and uncertain times, one thing is certain, Mainers are strong and resilient, and we will get through this together.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to my office with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Heather Johnson