

Guidance for Early Response Teams during COVID-19 outbreak

UMCOR USDR understands that early response team members who are not infected with the COVID-19 virus or may have already recovered from the virus want to help. Every state and territory is now under a federal disaster declaration; most states have shelter in place and social distancing guidelines. These general guidelines for early response teams are designed so you can effectively help volunteers through this crisis. All early response team activities should adhere to critical health and safety protocols in order to:

- Protect residents
- Protect survivors
- Protect volunteers
- Protect volunteers' families

For the latest updates in regard to COVID-19, please visit - [Centers for Disease Control](#)

General Guidance for Early Response Teams

1. Recognize that traditional responses may shift. Inform volunteers of any changes and provide updates on your conference's volunteer policy regarding COVID-19.
2. Recognize that some of your volunteers may be at a higher risk for infection. You may have early response teams who may need to change or suspend their service out of precaution.
3. Volunteers should not assume that they are at lower risk than others. We do not know if individuals who recovered from COVID 19 are immune from reinfection.
4. Be sure to keep up to date with the latest information and best practices from the Centers for Disease Control.
5. The CDC recommends that gatherings of no more than 10 take place. Please consider the following actions:
 - a. Do not gather volunteers for the purposes of registration or instruction.
 - b. Decrease the size of volunteer groups in order to adhere to the CDC guidelines.
 - c. Require volunteers to practice social distancing rules during tasks (at least 6 feet apart).
6. Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched (including pens used by survivors and volunteers to sign needed documents). Guidelines for using cleaning products can be found on the CDC and OSHA websites.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>
<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html#health>
7. Have handouts with best practices (social distancing, hand washing, symptom awareness, etc.).
8. Make sure you have the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) available, and train volunteers on its proper use before allowing them to do tasks.
9. Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies to all volunteers such as:
 - a. hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol
 - b. tissues
 - c. trash receptacles
 - d. disposable facemasks
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>
 - e. eye protection
 - f. gloves
 - g. cleaners and disinfectants
10. Screen all volunteers and survivors before meeting in person.
11. It is preferable that only one team member interact with the survivor on site.
12. Have an isolation space ready in case anyone arrives with symptoms or becomes ill.
13. Perform outdoor/exterior work only as possible.
14. The Safety Officer position on an ERT is key and should hold all members of the team accountable for following safe practices. Concerns should be brought to the attention of the Team Leader.

General Guidelines for Volunteers

1. DO plan for extra time for briefing and preparation for service.
2. DO clean and wash your hands for a minimum of 20 seconds before, during, and after volunteering.
3. DO avoid physical contact with others and maintain a social distance of at least 6 feet.
4. DO cover your cough and sneezes with tissue.
5. DO use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, if soap and water are not readily available. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
6. DO expect opportunities may be cancelled or changed on short notice.
7. DO use proper personal protective equipment (PPE) when needed/provided for the task.
8. DO NOT assume that you are at a lower risk if you have recovered from COVID or immune from reinfection.
9. DO NOT volunteer for any activity if, in the last 14 days, you have:
 - a. Experienced symptoms that could be related to COVID-19 (fever, cough, and difficulty breathing).
 - b. Been around anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
 - c. Traveled to any foreign country.
 - d. Been on a cruise or been in an airport.
10. DO NOT attempt to volunteer for any activity if you are feeling sick for any reason or at a higher risk because of serious illness or pre-existing medical conditions.
11. DO NOT volunteer if you live or have frequent contact with people at a higher risk of contracting the virus.
12. DO NOT show up for an early response team activity without confirming that:
 - a. There is a need.
 - b. Local responders have sought your support.
13. DO NOT take part in any volunteer activity if you are uncomfortable with the level of risk.
14. DO NOT touch your eyes, nose, and mouth with gloves or unwashed hands.

This supplemental guidance is not intended to replace medical recommendations from the CDC.

Please email, Angela Overstreet, UMCOR Disaster Response Consultant, at aoverstreet@umcor.org with any critical questions you may have.