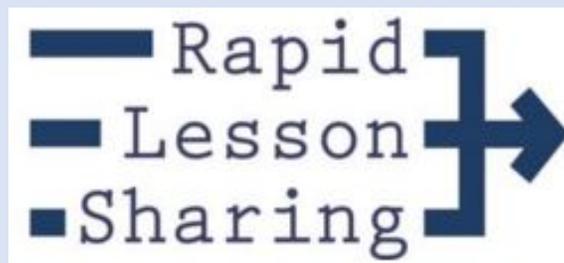


# Coronavirus Rapid Lesson Sharing Reports 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

A summary of coronavirus related lessons extracted from  
20 Rapid Lesson Sharing (RLS) reports.

Incidents included in this analysis occurred between  
June 14 and August 14, 2020.



September 15, 2020

*The Rapid Lesson Sharing process facilitated by the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center (LLC) has remained a valuable tool for the wildland fire community throughout the summer of 2020 as COVID-19 concerns and realities have persisted. We published an [initial summary of COVID-19 related lessons](#) in early July (07/02/2020). Home units, IMTs, crews, and single resources have remained diligent in their endeavor to support community learning, producing 18 additional documents since the initial summary was published. This second summary synthesizes and collates lessons from these reports.*

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### **Heed Your Symptoms**

This patient’s only symptom was the loss of taste and smell. That tipped the individual off—as well as the Fireline Medic—that there should be a high index of suspicion for COVID-19. This symptom was only experienced by the patient for approximately FOUR HOURS!

He first experienced it at breakfast, but by the time he ate lunch his taste was back. If he had questioned it at all or hadn’t been as brave as he was to speak up to his supervisor, then this COVID-19 positive individual would have just gone back to his business as usual and potentially exposed additional staff.

[Remote Duty Station COVID Positive RLS](#)

## 1. The Opportunity

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***“The fire community should embrace this time of change as an opportunity.”***

### **East Canyon Fire COVID 19 IMT Lessons**

Several of the RLS reports mention that some of the new practices brought on this season are marked improvements and should continue on as standard practice. Most have to do with digital tools increasing efficiency. Examples include:

- Digital/On-line check in.
- Digital/On-line demob.
- One stop demob (use phone calls instead of walking around for signatures).
- Electronic CTR submission. Several reports noted that the finance section had fewer issues with resources not turning in time because of the ability for it to be submitted from the field.
- Self-sufficiency and “scatter spike” is appreciated by many resources.

In most cases, it is reported that these processes took some experimenting and time to fine tune, but once they are established, they can work better than our previous practices.

The other opportunity that has been realized during this time is how well we are able to adapt if we empower, encourage, and embrace innovation from all levels. In the past, we typically would not be open to anyone suggesting a new approach to any of our processes. However, this situation has made us all more receptive to new approaches. We may want to sustain this willingness given the rapid evolution that has resulted.

## 2. Risk Management

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***“We are responsible for 700 people; it’s not worth the risk.”***

Medical Section Chief – **Mangum Fire Screening Tool RLS**

Reports addressed risk management in two ways:

- The risk that COVID itself presents.
- The risk that focusing on COVID will diminish attention to “normal” fireline hazards.

At least one report openly acknowledged that based on the severity of the impact COVID has had in their area, they treat COVID as the primary threat:

***“COVID-19 is the Incident—the Wildfire is the Incident Within the Incident.”***

### **NY State COVID RLS**

Although several reports mention the concern of diminished attention paid to “normal” fireline hazards, none mentioned this actually occurring. One review team noted that they actively looked for this phenomenon but did not witness it. Multiple reports mention that resources are very concerned about COVID anywhere **off** the fireline, whereas work on the fireline is a relief because they can carry out operations in a much more “normal” fashion and focus on the more familiar hazards.

Several of the reports acknowledge that vigilance is difficult to maintain when facing an unseen threat. Many reports do caution that compliance with protocols does relax as time goes on. These reports suggest periodic reiterating and enforcement of prevention protocol (see “Protocols” section).

Managing exposure by reducing the number of people utilized in operations is always part of how we deal with risk. Several reports emphasized the need to be very critical about how many resources are needed given the added risk that COVID presents.

### 3. Preparation

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***“Exactly one month earlier, the Fire Management Officer made some pivotal decisions.”***

**[Remote Duty Station COVID Positive](#)**

Multiple reports talk about the need for each unit to invest in preparations related to COVID-19. These preparations help all operations to go more smoothly as we all move around in response to incidents. Specific areas to focus on include:

- Acquiring tests for employees.
- Dealing with positive cases.
- Hosting off-unit resources.

All preparations are anchored with a single important lesson:

- Establish a relationship with the local County Public Health Department.

***“Consider establishing a “COVID Care” Representative at each home unit. Continue to reinforce the need for local units to coordinate with the local medical and public health communities to ensure common understanding of the process.”***

**[Bush Fire Positive Response](#)**

Additional lessons around preparation:

- Establish a small team tasked with a COVID positive response prior to your first case.
- Designate a COVID Care Rep who will handle communication if an employee tests positive while off-unit (on a fire assignment).

If you plan to host off-unit resources, consider the following:

- Set up staging areas for off-unit resources (with portable toilets/wash stations).
- Expect increased cost.

**Useful Reports for Preparation:**

**[Remote Duty Station COVID-19 Positive](#)**

**[Bush Fire COVID-19 Positive Response](#)**

### 4. Agency Administrators

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***“I hope this RLS provides other Agency Administrators a leg up.”***

**[Goose Creek Fire District Ranger Lessons](#)**

Several reports had specific lessons for Agency Administrators (AA). They focus on setting clear Leader’s Intent for IMTs concerning COVID mitigations.

- Include local COVID conditions (case count, trends, contacts) as part of IMT in-brief.
- Include county health officials as part of the IMT in-brief.

- AA can/should help facilitate IMT contact with local public health.
- AA needs to set clear intent on COVID-19 management.
- AA must ensure IMT has a COVID coordinator type position.
- Consider requesting remote access to planning meetings.
- Clarify in delegation what guidance to follow and who to involve should issues arise.

**Useful Reports for Agency Administrators:**  
[Goose Creek Fire District Ranger Lessons](#)  
[Great Basin IARR COVID 19 Report](#)

## 5. Mobilization

***“Responding to wildfires in a COVID-19 environment is evolving and differs based upon state and location”***

[Great Basin IARR COVID 19 Report](#)

Lessons have emerged regarding mobilization and travel to incidents.

- Make sure you have tools for self-screening (digital thermometer/MPHAT screening questions).
- Travel with 3-5 days of food and water on hand.
- Use unit log to track daily contacts to aid contact tracing if needed.
- Call ahead to incident to confirm check-in process.
- Be patient. Everything will take longer with COVID-19 protocols in place.

For those placing orders for resources:

- Make sure resource order includes electronic check-in procedures in 'special instructions' section.

**Useful Report for Mobilization:**  
[Great Basin IARR COVID 19 Report](#)

## 6. Protocols

Many of the lessons are focused around what does and doesn't work related to managing messaging and compliance around COVID-19 protocols. One theme continues to show up consistently:

***The IMT sets the tone and they must be consistent from the very beginning.***

Other lessons regarding Protocol:

- Involving the local Emergency Operations Center helps ensure alignment with local public health guidance.
- Ensure IMT members explaining protocols are clear on the intent and the procedures involved.



COVID-19 mitigations on the July Complex on California's Modoc National Forest.

IMTs have had success designating a COVID coordinator responsible for consistency around protocol.

- Assign a COVID-19 mitigation specialist.
- The IMT sets the example and must consistently require compliance from all cooperators.
- Plan for periodic protocol reinforcement as practice lapses.
- Provide specific guidance. Avoid a “do what makes you feel comfortable” approach.
- Consensus on what guidance to follow on the incident helps greatly when difficult decisions are faced.

## 7. Medical Organization

Multiple reports share lessons about designing a medical organization to fit the current situation. In most cases, the lessons point to a medical organization that includes the “standard” capacity to handle all the normal medical issues AND a COVID focused medical section.

- Modify org as needed. Example: Medical Section Chief overseeing a Planning MEDL, a Field MEDL, and an Infectious Disease MEDL.
- Develop MED process for symptomatic person coming in (evaluate in vehicle or “hot zone”).
- Get clear direction on IMT process for reporting symptomatic individuals.
- Establish relationship with local health department, hospitals, and Emergency Management.
- Develop COVID-19 plans/trigger points for numerous exposures.

For managing typical med unit interactions while reducing exposure:

- Use digital General Message and phone-in orders for typical med supply needs.

For Type 3 Incidents:

- Set up a MED unit, even if not typical on T-3.

For those who may deal with medical response to the public:

- Reevaluate protocol around med response to public. Consider COVID PPE, duty to act, etc. Provide clear guidance to EMTs.
- For any medical interaction (Search & Rescue, public emergency, etc.) treat patients as COVID positive.



Screening on the July Complex.

**Useful Report for Medical Lessons:**  
[Sawtooth Fire Medical Officer RLS](#)

## 8. Screening

Screening is a crucial part of COVID mitigations. Recent reports focus on lessons related to efficiency and effectiveness of developing a consistent screening process.

***“This [Wildland Fire COVID-19 Screening Tool](#) form is part of MPHAT’s interim standard operating [procedure](#) for wildland fire personnel at duty stations and wildland fire incidents.”***

**[Mangum Fire COVID Screening Tool RLS](#)**

- Establish clear screening protocols and implement them consistently.
- Sit in a cooler/shaded space prior to taking temperatures to help reduce false readings.
- Get in the habit of self-screening and documenting.
- Self-screening for everyone. Daily accountability check for all resources on Division Assignment List (ICS 204).
- Medical personnel perform daily check for ICP staff and use bracelets for daily accountability.



Bracelets used for daily accountability.

**Useful Reports for Screening Lessons:**  
[Mangum Fire COVID 19 Screening Tool](#)  
[Numbers Fire COVID Mitigation](#)

## 9. Briefing

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Briefing is crucial. In the past it has consisted of closely grouped people. Those conducting the briefing often called for people to “gather closer in.” We now must retrain ourselves to do the opposite. As we adjust how briefing occurs, lessons continue to be shared about how best to approach it.



For larger in-person morning briefings:

- Expect up to three days of adjusting briefing space to get distance compliance.
- Setting up chairs and having a controlled entry will help with compliance.
- Assume more people will attend briefing than you expect/desire.
- Actively limit briefing attendance. Set specific guidance on who should attend.
- Have a plan for bad weather to avoid huddling/going inside.

For Remote/Dispersed Briefings:

- Get good at radio briefings, both technical (radio/speaker set up) and delivery (clear and concise).
- Record briefings and use for mid-shift arrivals.
- Have external speakers that plug into BK radio for every Forward Operating Base (FOB).

For smaller field briefings:

- Use [IRPG COVID 19](#) briefing checklist for consistency.

## 10. Logistics

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***“Don’t assume you have to see them to support them.”***

**[Great Basin IARR COVID 19 Report](#)**

Many of the lessons in recent reports focus on Logistics. This season has certainly put an enormous burden on our Logistics sections while revealing their crucial nature and amazing capacity. Here are some of the common logistics lessons:

### The Layout

- Many teams have used a layout that includes an ICP, one or several Forward Operating Base (FOB), multiple spike camps and “scatter spikes” (self-sufficient crews in their own self-selected spots).
- Put extra time into planning the layout of ICP, FOB, Sleeping, and Medical. For example, having the medical tent located where a potentially infected individual does not need to walk through camp to access it.

- Keep track of “scatter spike” crews practicing self-sufficiency and camping on their own.
- A combination of Dispersed camping and Forward Operating Base worked well.
- Restrict access and use plastic shielded windows for ICP face-to-face interactions (Plans, Finance, Supply, etc.).

### Staff Up

Many of the logistics lessons focused on the need for more than normal staffing of the section.

- Order additional camp crews.
- Use more Logistics staff than normal to support dispersed camping.
- 3 Logistics Section Chiefs needed (Planning, ICP, FOB).
- Ramp-up LOGS section—way more staff than “typical” T-3 incident.
- Operations needs to help logistics!

**Useful Report for Logistics:**  
[Great Basin IARR COVID 19](#)

### Self Sufficiency

- Be willing to support self-sufficiency of operational resources.
- Be prepared to provide “S” numbers in support of self-sufficiency.

## 11. Digital Tools

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***“Online Check-In...Excellent. No need to ever go back to in-person check-in.”***

**IHC Superintendent**

The use of digital tools in response to COVID-19 has been a rapid adjustment for our workforce. This has mostly been a trial and error process that, in most cases, ultimately results in gained efficiency. It is in this area that many new practices will remain well after the threat of COVID is gone.

### **Important Lesson:**

**Sharing phone/email contacts throughout chain of command is crucial.**

### Camp/Forward Operating Base Site Selection

- Cell coverage/IT needs may play larger role in location of ICP than in past.

### Check-In

- Photo versions of forms accepted at check-in.
- Electronic communication between check-in and Finance is key for common operating picture.

### Demob

- One stop demob worked well. Demob staff place phone calls to each unit rather than individuals visiting each unit for signatures.
- QR code for demob sheet works: identify an IMT POC for those unfamiliar with digital tools.
- Demob possible through Microsoft TEAMS.

### Finance

- Electronic CTRs worked well with no signatures, fixed hours for everyone on the incident.
- Digital CTR/signed CTR picture eventually worked, took time to fine tune.
- Order email manager or DOCL to manage email tracking.
- Fewer issues with late timesheets when field resources able to submit digitally.
- Additional help needed to monitor email with digital submissions.

## Tools and Process

- Have one electronic inbox and a dedicated person to monitor it.
- IMT could benefit from having Zoom pro licenses.
- Have Adobe Pro, Zoom, MS Teams all set for IMT if possible.
- Develop electronic doc submission process early and communicate it often.
- Have PDF Pro access for Section Chiefs. Use for digital signatures and creating form fillable docs.

**Useful Report for Lessons on Digital Tools:**  
[Numbers Fire COVID Mitigation](#)

## 12. Testing

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COVID testing coordination is a major issue to account for on incidents and at the home unit. Most reports reiterate the need to coordinate with your local public health department on this front. It seems the importance of this specific lesson cannot be overstated.

- Testing is a point-in-time and not always accurate.
- Having specific triggers for testing is helpful.
- Have logistics for isolation/quarantine pre-identified.
- Know specifically the who, when, and how of the testing process.
- Develop multiple isolation options. Test results take time. Multiple crews awaiting testing is challenging.
- As the need for testing arises (symptoms/exposure), begin acting on logistics (vehicles, lodging, etc.).
- Make sure you understand the test results process. Make sure results get to individuals.
- Assign an IC to oversee the entire incident (testing, quarantine, isolation, travel, coordination, etc.).
- Testing may be difficult to obtain, especially with asymptomatic individuals. Developing relationships with local public health officials is imperative.
- Know ahead of time what paperwork for testing is required and how financial responsibility will be handled.
- Some hesitancy of reporting due to financial concerns (missed assignment) exists. Proven rapid testing helps alleviate this.
- Contact with county health department early proved helpful for camp setup and planning for testing/tracing.
- Use PIO, Liaison, or Agency Administrator in contacting Public Health Office if no response.

**Useful Report for Lessons on Testing:**  
[COVID Positive Off Unit Firefighter](#)

## 13. Contact Tracing

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The report that included lessons about contact tracing uniformly described its difficulty. The main lesson is:  
***Start your contact tracing as early as possible – before it's needed (daily basis) is ideal.***

- Contact tracing is difficult. Start contact logs early.
- Get in the habit of using unit log to track daily contacts to use for contact tracing if needed.
- County health professionals may not get involved in the contact tracing as anticipated.

**Useful Report for Lessons on Contact Tracing:**  
[Sawtooth Fire Contact Tracing RLS](#)

## 14. Positive Cases

What happens when someone tests positive? This question has many different answers. There have been several reports that chronicle what occurs and what we can do better on this front. Most lessons focus on coordination with local public health and the logistics involved with isolation/quarantine. Preparation, once again, is the key.

### Once Positive is Confirmed

- Appoint family liaison.
- Streamline communication through liaison. Email updates to all others in chain of command.
- Appoint a patient advocate to field calls and complete paperwork for the recovering patient.
- Once isolation is in progress, make sure a medical professional is involved for trigger points for hospitalization.
- Managers must share a consistent answer on how long an individual must isolate/quarantine.

**“Having the home unit Forest Safety Officer involved from the beginning was extremely helpful, particularly when tracking down answers to COVID-19 administrative questions.”**

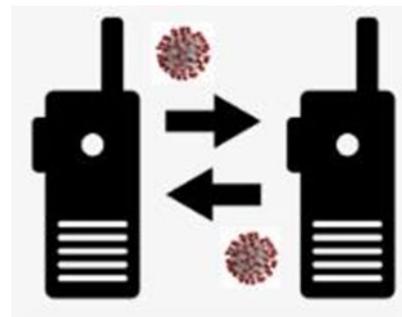
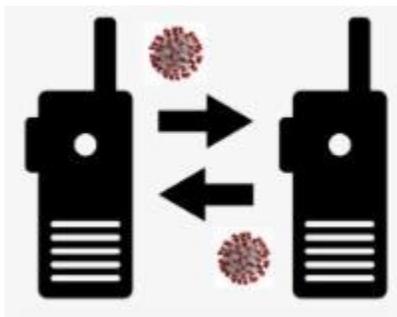
[COVID-19 Positive Off Unit Firefighter](#)

### When Someone Tests Positive while Away from Home Unit

- Home unit and host unit need to connect early and coordinate.
- With multiple positive tests, assign an IARR and Family Liaison.
- With multiple positive tests, set up coordination call with all agencies, supervisors, incident overhead ASAP. Coordinate.
- Hotel isolation can work well if closely coordinated and monitored. Daily communication is imperative.

**Useful reports for Positive Case Lessons:**

[Bush Fire Positive Response](#)  
[COVID-19 Positive Off Unit Firefighter](#)



### **COVID-19 Discussion Forum**

*This forum provides a platform for the greater fire community to ask questions or share ideas, information, and solutions:*

[COVID-19 and Fire Season 2020 Community](#)

## 15. COVID-19 RLS Reports Used

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[Lump Gulch Fire Type 3 IMT COVID-19 Mitigation Lessons \(2020\)](#)

[New York State COVID-19 Mitigations \(2020\)](#)

[Mangum Fire Using the COVID-19 Screening Tool \(2020\)](#)

[Helitack COVID-19 Positive Tests \(2020\)](#)

[Public Medical Response in the COVID Era \(2020\)](#)

[Bush Fire PIO Lessons \(2020\)](#)

[Sand Creek Fire COVID-19 IMT Lessons \(2020\)](#)

[Bush Fire Response and Support to Handcrew Positive COVID-19 Tests \(2020\)](#)

[East Canyon Fire COVID-19 IMT Lessons \(2020\)](#)

[Goose Creek COVID-19 Lessons \(2020\)](#)

[Goose Creek Fire District Ranger COVID-19 Lessons \(2020\)](#)

[COVID-19 Positive Off Unit Firefighter \(2020\)](#)

[Great Basin IARR COVID-19 Report \(2020\)](#)

[Numbers Fire COVID-19 Mitigation \(2020\)](#)

[Remote Duty Station COVID 19 Positive \(2020\)](#)

[July Complex COVID-19 RLS \(2020\)](#)

[Bridger-Teton NF Interagency Helicopter SAR COVID Mitigations \(2020\)](#)

[Montrose Complex COVID Positive Employee Lessons \(2020\)](#)

[COVID-19 Era Lessons and Observations from an IHC Superintendent](#)

[Apple Fire COVID-19 Mitigations](#)