



## Police interviewing in the era of COVID-19 A resource guide

Many aspects of modern life have been profoundly affected by the global pandemic. This includes procedures for interviewing witnesses and suspects in criminal investigations. Both police officers and those being questioned may be required to wear protective face masks. This may result in changes to:

- The behaviour of police officers
- The behaviour of those being questioned
- Interviewing techniques (e.g., procedures for establishing rapport)
- The presence of third parties (lawyers, interpreters, support persons).

[Forensii](#) currently maintains a [resource page](#) for police officers, lawyers, social workers, and other involved in the interviewing in the criminal justice system. These resources include changed legal requirements and practical tips for interviewers.

Please note that many of the issues are relatively new and as such the recommendations are sometimes based more on intuition than empirical evidence.

### Starter sources

- International Association of Chiefs of Police (2020) offer a practical guide about [COVID-19 for law enforcement](#).
- Interpol offer [COVID-19 pandemic: Guidelines for law enforcement](#).
- Karl Roberts (2019), [Policing the pandemic](#): Managing the police response to COVID-19 Coronavirus, published in *Blue Line*.

## Interviewing considerations

### *Policy guidelines*

- The Law Society (2020) in the UK, in conjunction with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) have developed a coronavirus (COVID-19) [interview protocol](#).

### *Interviewing suspects via the telephone*

- Hoover and Thompson (2020) describe the pros and cons of [conducting remote interviews](#) by telephone.

### *Interviewing suspects via Zoom*

- Hager (2020) describes how interviewing practices have changed with COVID-19, including the use of video-conferencing [software such as Zoom](#). For example,  
“Detectives in Philadelphia, Miami and elsewhere said they are increasingly conducting interviews of suspects, witnesses and victims out in the street and six feet apart, instead of indoors. In Clearwater, Florida, for instance, they’re often doing so in the parking lot outside of their station.”
- The US-based Police Executive Research Forum (2020) asked police executives [how COVID-19 was affecting homicide investigations](#). In some locations the use of Zoom was already in use pre-pandemic. In other locations a lack of computers meant shifts had to be arranged to allow access to limited resources.

### *Interviewing with a mask on*

- As part of the ‘*W Z Coffee Break Series*’, US-based interview training company *Wicklander-Zulawski & Associates* (WicklanderZulawski, 2020), focus on the difficulties (and opportunities) of [interviewing with a mask](#) on.

### *Interviewing ‘themes’*

- Senese (2020), from US-based *John E. Reid and Associates*, writes about the use of ‘themes’ during interviews with suspects in COVID-19 [hate crime cases](#).

## Policing

- Policing & Family Harm: International Perspectives on the response to COVID-19. A discussion on [Policing & Family Harm](#). Produced by the Australian and New Zealand Society of Evidence-Based Policing.
- van Dijk, A. J., Herrington, V., Crofts, N., Breunig, R., Burris, S., Sullivan, H., Middleton, J., Sherman, S., & Thomson, N. (2019). Law enforcement and public health: recognition and enhancement of joined-up solutions. *The Lancet*, 393(10168), 287-294. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32839-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32839-3). A pre-COVID-19 publication that highlights the public health role police officers can play.

## Other developments

- A journalist (Riosa, 2020) describes an incident in Victoria when a person using a prepared script [refused to answer police questions](#) at a check-point.

- A [US county health director](#) describes how some (quite a lot) of people react when called by contact tracers. This is not an interviewing piece, but this is a remarkable description of human psychology at its worst. If people react this way to medical professionals, its likely that police officers will encounter even worse.

“Probably half of the people we call are skeptical or combative. They refuse to talk. They deny their own positive test results. They hang up. They say they’re going to hire a lawyer. They give you fake people they’ve spent time with and fake numbers. They lie and tell you they’re quarantining alone at home, but then in the background you can hear the beeping of a scanner at Walmart.”

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### **About this resource**

Forensii maintains this resource page as a free service for members of the criminal justice system. If you would like to recommend additional resources on this topic, please contact Dr Stephen Moston ([smoston@forensii.com](mailto:smoston@forensii.com)).

This document can be freely distributed (e.g., through mailing lists, or on websites), provided it is not in any way altered).

### **About Forensii**

Forensii provides training in legal and forensic psychology. Courses are offered at introductory through to advanced levels. For more information: [www.forensii.com](http://www.forensii.com)

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