

COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Integrated Public Alert & Warning System

Background

- [Integrated Public Alert & Warning System \(IPAWS\)](#), the nation's alert and warning infrastructure, provides public safety officials with an effective way to message the public about serious emergencies.
- This document describes how state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments can best use IPAWS to inform the public of the rapidly evolving coronavirus pandemic disease (COVID-19) response actions.
- The following is a list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing COVID-19 operations across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute and should not be considered as guidance in any way.¹

Key Considerations

- In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, SLTT governments have used IPAWS to inform the public of policy changes and COVID-19 cases, encourage social distancing, ask for healthcare volunteers and medical supplies, instruct people on getting medical care, and mitigate disinformation.
- For a two-hour training on the benefits of using IPAWS and best practices to draft effective warning messages, visit the FEMA [Emergency Management Institute Independent Study training site](#).

Lessons Learned Related to COVID-19 Operations and IPAWS

Announcing Stay at Home and Curfew Orders

- **Potential Best Practice:** Multiple jurisdictions have used IPAWS to notify the public of stay at home orders and shelter in place policies, including reminders and notifications of extensions and/or modifications. El Paso County, Texas, and the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management used IPAWS to encourage residents to avoid parks, family gatherings, and churches over the Easter holiday.
- **Potential Best Practice:** Multiple jurisdictions have used IPAWS to notify residents of the closure of non-essential business, parks, beaches, courthouses, and other government services.

¹ This document contains references and links to non-federal resources and organizations. This information is meant solely for informational purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the U.S. government.



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- **Potential Best Practice:** Puerto Rico Emergency Management Agency; Hillsborough County, Florida, Fire Rescue Office of Emergency Management; San Miguel County, New Mexico, Office of Emergency Management, and Limestone County, Texas, used IPAWS to notify the public of curfews in effect.

Emphasizing Social Distancing Practices and Personal Care

- **Potential Best Practice:** Multiple jurisdictions have used IPAWS to encourage residents to practice social distancing. Specifically, Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, Emergency Management Agency and the Florida Division of Emergency Management used IPAWS to encourage at-risk populations, including those over 65 years or those with medical conditions, to avoid public spaces. Additionally, El Paso County, Texas used IPAWS to encourage residents to use face coverings and practice social distancing.
- **Potential Best Practice:** El Paso County, Texas 9-1-1 District used IPAWS to encourage the public to maintain personal hygiene, by washing hands, coughing into elbows, avoiding touching the face, and staying six feet apart.

Receiving Medical Care

- **Potential Best Practice:** Multiple jurisdictions are using IPAWS to provide residents with information on how to receive care if they are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, including by calling their primary care physician or a non-emergency call line.
- **Potential Best Practice:** Rowan County, Kentucky, used IPAWS to disseminate information regarding COVID-19 testing.

Seeking Licensed Healthcare Workers and Medical Resources

- **Potential Best Practice:** The New York City Office of Emergency Management used IPAWS to issue a call for licensed healthcare workers. Similarly, the State of Illinois encouraged licensed healthcare workers to sign-up at a state website to help fight COVID-19.
- **Potential Best Practice:** The Santa Clara County, California, Office of Emergency Services used IPAWS to ask residents and businesses to complete a confidential survey detailing their inventory of large amounts of personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators, so the county is aware of resources.

Updating COVID-19 Cases

- **Potential Best Practice:** Multiple counties have used IPAWS to alert citizens of confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Mitigating Disinformation

- **Potential Best Practice:** El Paso County, Texas used IPAWS to warn residents of fake text messages warning of a national mandatory quarantine and guided them to a reliable information source.

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov.