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## COVID-19 GUIDE FOR VISUAL CREATORS

1. **Wear a mask.** Masks prevent the spread of COVID-19 by preventing the spray of droplets by the person wearing a mask. Cotton masks, scarves, or bandanas, when covering your mouth and nose, can prevent spread of the virus. **It is important to recognize that cloth masks offer unidirectional protection, and they do not offer any protection from people around you who are not properly wearing masks. Physical distancing is still needed for those wearing cloth masks, and masks need to be worn correctly (completely covering mouth and nose, and hands need to be cleaned before and after any touching of the mask).** Surgical masks, which are made of polyurethane material and repel water, are very effective when worn in combination with goggles or a face shield. N-95 masks offer even more protection. Both surgical masks and N-95 masks can only be worn for up to four hours as they are not as effective once they become moist.
2. **Socially distance yourself.** Take your telephoto lens with you, because you should be doing your documenting from 2 meters (6 feet or two arm lengths) away. COVID-19 is spread two ways: droplets in the air and contaminated objects (followed by touching your eyes, nose, or mouth). Distancing yourself by 2 meters means that any droplets that you or the person you are photographing produce are less likely to reach the other person's airway. Yes, you produce droplets – any time that you sneeze, cough, sing, or talk, you produce small droplets in a cloud around you, and if the other person is far enough away, they won't be at risk of inhaling infected particles.
3. **Wash your hands.** You're going to need to prioritize and get creative for how you can wash your hands several times a day while out on assignment. Hand sanitizer (>70% ethanol) is great for when you don't have easy access to a sink, but even more effective than sanitizer is soap and water. To wash your hands well, imagine you have just touched something disgusting (because you probably did), and to get all that COVID-19 off, you need to wash all the surfaces of your hands for more than 20 seconds. When you get home, immediately wash your hands again, and consider leaving your shoes outside the house, and going straight to the shower.
4. **Sanitize everything.** Assume that **all** objects, including **all** of your equipment, are contaminated with COVID-19 virus. Live, infectious virus has been detected on different surfaces more than a week after exposure (Riddell, Virology Journal, 2020). Virus survival times depend on temperature; in general, hotter temperatures (up to 40°C) decrease virus survival time, but do not immediately kill virus. Conversely, at 20°C virus can survive days to weeks longer. **See below a detailed guide on sanitizing camera gear.**
5. **Understand that you are a threat.** Prior to this pandemic, visual journalists and their editors needed to consider how to protect journalists when doing dangerous things. This is still true now (there are rare cases of young healthy people getting quite ill, so don't assume you are invincible), but a larger concern should be protection of the people you are reporting on and the general population. You really need to have an extremely compelling reason and strict safety plan to enter the home of someone "high risk" and put them in danger to tell your story. While many people are staying inside their homes, you are out on assignment, and it is your responsibility not to track COVID-19 with you everywhere you go.

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6. **Don't forget about COVID-19 on assignment.** Even on assignments not directly related to COVID-19, you still need to be prepared and make a plan for prevention of COVID-19 on each assignment. The risk to yourself, others, and the healthcare system isn't worth it.
7. **Don't fly if you can avoid it.** Editors should not be sending people on any assignments that require a flight; there are talented photojournalists and videographers all over the world.

## If you do fly, here are a few tips for reducing risk

- Make sure you are vigilant about mask-wearing and hand hygiene at all times during your travel. A taxi ride to the airport is higher risk than sitting in the airplane.
- Travel with alcohol spray, hand sanitizer, and/or bleach wipes. Before you take your seat in the plane, wipe down all surfaces: the armrests, tray table, screen, etc.
- Open the air vent all the way and aim it at your lap, so that it blows just past (but not on) your face (this may be cold, but it will help push droplets from other people down before they reach your mouth).
- Keep your mask on as much as possible, and stagger eating and drinking with the people around you, so that you're not all unmasked at the same time.

## And here are a couple tips on driving to an assignment:

- Try to avoid riding with multiple people together in one car.
  - If you are in a car with multiple people, everyone needs to have a mask on over their mouth and nose.
  - Open at least two windows, at least slightly open.
8. **Don't break quarantine** to take an assignment (and editors should be asking about quarantine when giving assignments). If you have had a known exposure, or if you are coming from an area with high prevalence of COVID-19, remember to check local public health guidelines for quarantine requirements. You may be required to do 14 days of quarantine, and you may need to plan for that. **Quarantine means do NOT under any circumstances leave your house/apartment or let anyone else in. This can save lives.**
  9. **Don't underestimate the number of cases.** You shouldn't be making decisions about risk based on the number of reported cases. I have heard the sentiment, "there are only a few cases here" echoed many times. As you've all heard, testing is a limited resource and given the large numbers of people with little to no symptoms who are infected, **you should assume that in most places there are far more cases than you know about.**
  10. **Don't go out if you have any symptoms** such as fever, cough, muscle aches, sore throat, headache, loss of sense of smell. **Do NOT leave your home, at all** (unless you're having trouble breathing, then go to the hospital). No one comes in and no one goes out. **Otherwise, you are putting other people at risk.** If you live with others, please have designated "hot zones" where you alone are allowed to go, no one else. Have "hot zone" towels, etc. Do not leave your house until your symptoms are gone. If you do not have access to testing, wait a full 72 hours after symptoms resolve. **If you test positive for COVID-19, stay isolated until at least 24 hours have passed since your last fever** (without the use of fever reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms e.g., cough, shortness of breath); **AND at least 10 days have passed since**

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**symptoms first appeared.** If you test positive but have not had any symptoms, self-isolate at least 10 days since the date of the first positive COVID-19 test.

11. **Don't assume you know what you're doing.** This virus is new, and we are learning new things about it all the time. By the time you read this, there may be updated information that is not included here. Many visual journalists have gained important skills to keep themselves safe while covering Ebola. While some of them (good equipment cleaning and hygiene practices) are helpful, others may lead you to a false sense of security. Thankfully, COVID-19 infections are not as severe as Ebola infections; however, that means it is harder to detect and contain cases of COVID-19. Please monitor yourself for symptoms, but unlike Ebola, a daily temperature reading doesn't exclude the possibility that you have COVID-19.

## Sanitizing Camera Gear

Sanitizers – here is the science, use your own judgment about what should or shouldn't be used on your equipment.

- i. Soap and water – this is very effective at breaking down dirt layers, which can trap virus on your skin, as well as directly destroying COVID-19 virus if applied for > 20 seconds.
- ii. Ethanol – must be >60% to sanitize, but I would highly recommend >70% ethanol to ensure effectiveness - the higher the concentration the shorter the time needed to kill virus.
- iii. Hydrogen peroxide – must be > 0.5% and left on for 1 minute (at that concentration)
- iv. Chlorhexidine digluconate – must be >0.02% and left on for 10 minutes (at that concentration)
- v. Bleach (or sodium hypochlorite) – at concentrations >0.21% and left on for 30 seconds [this can be made by mixing 1 part bleach to 10 parts water (or 3 Tablespoons of bleach in 2 cups of water) and only stays active for about 24 hours, so don't make a big batch and don't mix bleach with anything else besides water, because chemistry].
- vi. UV light – In theory, sunlight could kill virus, but the time needed completely depends on the amount of UV exposure, which is difficult to measure. My recommendation is to not rely on sunlight to sanitize equipment. UV light is only an effective solution if you have access to a UV germicidal irradiation tower.

Tom O'Brien, a Photo Engineer at National Geographic, provided us with these additional recommendations for equipment cleaning:

- Do not soak/submerge cameras or lenses in any solution. Lightly mist it on, let it sit, and then then wipe it around and into crevices. Get everything. Cotton swabs can be useful for cleaning small areas around control dials.
  - Rotate dials to all positions when cleaning. This includes the typical front and back thumb/index finger dials.
- If you have to use a hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipe, make sure to get into small crevices, and then also wipe down with a damp (**not soaking**) wet towel.
- I suggest everyone use a sacrificial UV/clear filter on front of lens, so that you can clean your camera as often as needed without worrying about damage to lens coating. A front lens element repair is hundreds of dollars, while a half decent UV/clear filter is well under \$50 USD.
- If you are using a lens hood that has a 'fuzzy' or felt interior, you will have hard time cleaning this. Avoid using felt lined lens hoods when photographing this subject when possible.

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- When using zoom lenses that have a moving/retracting section (the lens physically moves when zooming) be sure to fully extend the lens to disinfect as much as possible.
- A weather sealed camera is not air tight, so assume the inside of the camera to be 'hot' (contaminated) if you are going into 'hot' areas (i.e. ICU, ride alongs with EMT).
- Clean your viewfinder and wear eye protection to limit transmission via mucous membranes (your eyes).
- There is no standard recommendation for sanitizing microphones, which are very moisture sensitive. High concentration alcohol spray may be ok, but there are no guarantees. After 3-4 days left in your hot zone at home, the virus will be dead, and the microphone will be safe to touch again. If you don't have the luxury of time, you may need to invest in a UV light machine to sanitize delicate equipment like microphones.
- >70% Ethanol or >70% IPA sprays are the best option, and higher concentrations reduce the time needed to kill virus and dry faster. **An important note:** If using ethanol that is **denatured**, which is what most people can find for purchase, it should only be denatured with compounds like IPA or methanol as these are compounds that are common in lens/sensor cleaning solutions and thus safe for the cameras. Often you will find ethanol that is denatured with things like kerosene and other nasty petrochemicals. We do not want these on our cameras or around us.
- Straps:
  - Use multiple straps and put the dirty/'hot' straps into sealed plastic bags until you can clean them or they wait 3-4 days for the virus to die off.
  - Put metal rings on your camera strap loops and just use disposable straps that you make every day. Suggested materials: paracord and old climbing rope, if you have them.
  - Or if you have daily access to a washing machine/sink + drying rack, wash your strap(s) in cold water only and hang dry.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

If you absolutely must be in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, you really should be wearing full Personal Protective Equipment (goggles, mask, plastic gown, gloves, etc.) and know how to use PPE correctly - watch <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=bG6zISnenPg> for how to put them on and more importantly how to take them off. Again, this gets into issues of resource allocation, but please be informed about how to protect yourself.

For more information, see recommendations regarding the use of masks from the WHO and CDC.

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