



Fire Management Board

FIRE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FMB Memorandum No. 21-006

20 July 2021

TO: Fire Management Board Members

FROM: Erin Horsburgh, FMB Chair *Erin Horsburgh*

SUBJECT: MPHAT Wildland Fire COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation 2021

The purpose of this memorandum is to request wide distribution of the attached *Wildland Fire COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation 2021* guidance issued from the Medical and Public Advisory Team (MPHAT) July 17, 2021.

The following has been excerpted as recommendations for fire leadership.

- Fire managers, agency administrators, line officers and incident managers need to re-enforce the importance of prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in the workplace.
 - MPHAT would like to remind all leadership and fire personnel that following MPHAT's guidance has been proven effective and is critical to prevent the further spread of COVID-19.
 - Leader's intent and expectations must be clear that COVID-19 prevention and mitigation is still a priority for the 2021 fire season.
 - With vaccination status not being systematically tracked, face covering/mask and physical distancing requirements on wildfire incidents needs strengthened – everyone follow COVID-19 prevention and mitigation guidance for un-vaccinated individuals regarding physical distancing and mask/face covering use in fire camp unless alone in an enclosed space or actively engaged in firefighting on the fireline.
- Fire managers, agency administrators, line officers and incident managers need to prioritize and incorporate COVID-19 strategies that were effective and considered standard operating procedures in 2020 such as:
 - daily individual screening tool, distributive operations, spike camps, boxed meals, community cooler mitigations, remote briefings, decentralized staging areas, virtual and remote participation, and module as one (updated) to the maximum extent possible.

The MPHAT memorandum will be loaded shortly at <https://www.nwcg.gov/coronavirus>.

Distribution:

Fire Executive Council Members

National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group Members

NWCG Executive Board Members

COVID-19 Coordinator

Date: 17 July 2021

TO: Erin Horsburgh, Chair, Fire Management Board

FROM: L. Kaili McCray, Chair, Medical and Public Health Advisory Team (MPHAT)

SUBJECT: **Wildland Fire COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation 2021**

Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome- Coronavirus- 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) remains a significant threat to 2021 fire operations. As of mid-July, the Delta variant is now the dominant strain of COVID-19 in the U.S. and is proving to be more contagious than other predominant variants. The U.S. saw a dramatic decrease in the number of COVID-19 cases following vaccination, which resulted in a science-based relaxing of public health recommendations and requirements. However, cases, hospitalizations, and deaths due to COVID-19 are again increasing in many areas across the nation. While there are some infections occurring among fully vaccinated individuals, most of the new cases are occurring among individuals who are not fully vaccinated, and nearly all deaths and hospitalizations are among those who have not been vaccinated.

As the U.S. has been experiencing an increasing number of COVID-19 cases, the interagency wildland fire community is also experiencing a rise in cases among our fire personnel. This is especially true as mitigations on fires are relaxing. Other illnesses such as camp crud, common colds, and influenza which were prevented with mitigations last year but have historically impacted wildfire operations may also contribute to increased illnesses and reduced response capacity across the U.S. with these relaxed mitigations.

At the current Preparedness Level 5 (PL5), wildland fire response resources have become limited, with many resource requests *unable to fill*. The wildland fire community is a small subset of the population with a limited number of individuals that can do the job. Given the increase in the spread of COVID-19 across the U.S., and among the wildland fire community, the transitory nature of our workforce coming from many different states, and the unknown vaccination status of our workforce, it is extremely important to implement infection control mitigations **now** to keep our wildland fire personnel safe and healthy.

Currently, reports from the field indicate very limited application of the MPHAT science-based, fire-specific, infection control measures (e.g. mask wearing, hand hygiene, physical distancing, moduling as one) taking place on incidents among any personnel. MPHAT recommends fire leadership address this gap immediately and reinforce infection control practices and mitigation strategies implemented last year and include these in the delegations to Incident Management Teams.

To do this, fire leadership should implement the following:

- Fire managers, agency administrators, line officers and incident managers need to re-enforce the importance of prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in the workplace.
 - MPHAT would like to remind all leadership and fire personnel that following MPHAT's guidance has been proven effective and is critical to prevent the further spread of COVID-19.
 - Leader's intent and expectations must be clear that COVID-19 prevention and mitigation is still a priority for the 2021 fire season.
 - With vaccination status not being systematically tracked, face covering/mask and physical distancing requirements on wildfire incidents needs strengthened – **everyone** follow COVID-

19 prevention and mitigation guidance for un-vaccinated individuals regarding physical distancing and mask/face covering use in fire camp unless alone in an enclosed space or actively engaged in firefighting on the fireline.

- Fire managers, agency administrators, line officers and incident managers need to prioritize and incorporate COVID-19 strategies that were effective and considered standard operating procedures in 2020 such as:
 - daily individual screening tool, distributive operations, spike camps, boxed meals, community cooler mitigations, remote briefings, decentralized staging areas, virtual and remote participation, and module as one (updated) to the maximum extent possible.
- Expand the scope of the Wildland Fire Incident COVID-19 Tracker during PL5 to include required reporting of all COVID-19 cases experienced by incident-going personnel to maintain a high level of awareness of potential impact on resources. Agency-specific reporting should also continue as required.
- Require all personnel who are exposed but are not fully vaccinated follow MPHAT guidance in regard to not physically reporting to work during the time period that they should be quarantining following an exposure to another person who was diagnosed with COVID-19. This simple measure significantly reduces the likelihood of COVID-19 outbreaks that can have detrimental impacts on other wildland firefighters and wildland fire operations.
- Require all personnel that have been fully vaccinated that become symptomatic follow MPHAT guidance in regard to not physically reporting to work and notify their supervisor of their symptoms.
- Be aware of local and state public health guidance and orders. As local and state regulators change their requirements for masks, it is important to be familiar with and apply all applicable policies.

Despite an active fire season in 2020, we were able to maintain firefighting capacity and prevent COVID-19. By not following public health prevention measures, fire personnel can endanger the health of others on the incident and affect the resource availability to respond to the already elevated 2021 wildfire season. There is an opportunity to intervene and *hold the door* on the potential impact of infectious disease on our workforce. Leadership must prioritize infection control measures, communicate their expectations, and continue to take steps to safeguard human life and protect their most valuable resources this fire season. **The COVID-19 pandemic is not over.**

Supportive Material

Daily individual screening tool <https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/docs/eb-fmb-wildland-fire-covid-19-screening-tool.pdf>

MPHAT [Guidance for Prevention and Management of COVID-19 During Wildland Fire | NWCG](#)

Module as one blog <https://wildfirelessons.blog/2021/06/14/what-does-module-as-one-mean-in-2021/>
[Fire Management Board - COVID 19 Information | NWCG](#)