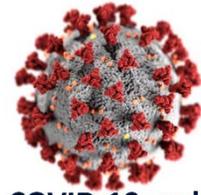


# Rapid Lesson Sharing

**Event Type:** COVID-19 Test  
Response and Protocol  
for Helitack Crewmember  
Who Had Been on the 84 Fire

**Date:** May 6-20, 2020

**Location:** San Juan National Forest  
Colorado



**COVID-19 and  
Fire Season 2020 Lessons**  
For the latest on COVID-19 visit

[CDC.gov/COVID19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)



## This Crew's COVID-19 Precautions and Actions Taken in Response to a Crewmember Running a Fever Post Fire

By Kelly Rudger, Helitack Supervisor  
Durango Helitack, San Juan National Forest

On May 5-6, Durango Helitack crewmembers responded to an Initial Attack fire, the 84 Fire on the San Juan National Forest. Five Helitack Crewmembers IA'd the fire on May 5 and spent that night on the front lawn of a nearby fire station. The Helicopter Manager flew to the fire with three of the five Helitack crewmembers, while the other two crewmembers drove in separate vehicles.

For "Lessons" and "Questions that Need to Be Addressed and Answered" sections see pages 3 and 4.

Manager+3 is the minimum staffing for a Type 2 Helicopter. We are flying with minimum staffing during COVID-19. Within the confines of a Type 2 Helicopter, there can be no social distance spacing of 6 feet unless only the pilot is onboard.

### 'Module as One' Interactions

The Durango Helitack Crew operates as a "Module as One", splitting the 11 person crew into two Squads. One Squad staffs the helicopter from its base of operations with the three-person contract flight crew (Pilot, Mechanic, Fuel Truck Driver). The other half is on call from their place of residence on ordered standby and responds if activated on a delayed response.



Durango Helitack crewmembers on Initial Attack on the 84 Fire.

This schedule switches every seven days, with a day off for each squad every 13 days.

Approximately 100 personnel were assigned to the 84 Fire. Interaction among firefighters occurred as near normal and social distancing was practiced when able. Handshakes and similar pleasantries weren't practiced as one would expect under the current coronavirus guidelines.

At end of shift, the five Helitack crewmembers got into the two vehicles that were driven to the fire, two crewmembers in one vehicle and three in the other. People stayed in the same vehicles throughout and the drivers didn't change.

As the "Module as One" concept goes, we have self-isolated



Durango Helitack Crew vehicles.

from each other for 14 days prior to working with each other. In many cases, our people have spent twice that time self-isolating from each other—or longer. As mentioned above, our crew operates in two units. While one unit works together we wear cloth masks when practicable and the other unit is teleworking in an ordered standby fashion. Training has been conducted virtually to minimize exposure among each other. However, when the fire alarm goes off we work together as one module.

### **Post Fire – Crewmember is Running a Fever**

A Helitack crewmember from the 84 Fire called in the morning of May 7, telling their Supervisor that they had run a fever overnight. This individual was one of the five who spent the night on the 84 Fire. Additionally, that morning, 10 of 11 of the crew gathered together in a physical setting and did an AAR on the 84 Fire. This was the first time crewmembers had gathered as crew.

This gathering took a total of 25 days to occur from the first onboarding of seasonal employees.

## ***Our crewmembers self-monitor themselves daily using the Wildland Fire COVID-19 Screening Tool.***

### **Actions Taken**

- ❖ The Helitack crewmember made the right decision by calling the Supervisor and informing about the sick symptoms and staying home. We have stressed time and again that if you are sick or have been around sick individuals, let your Supervisor know and you will stay home in self-isolation.
- ❖ Our crewmembers self-monitor themselves daily using the Wildland Fire COVID-19 Screening Tool.
- ❖ The sick Helitack crewmember took their temperature both from the base on the evening of May 6 and at home and determined they were running a fever.
- ❖ The Helitack Superintendent's Supervisor was notified of the sick crewmember.
- ❖ The sick crewmember chose to take the testing option (#2 outlined below).
- ❖ I spoke with the sick crewmember directly on the phone and told them the process I was following regarding the above mentioned FMB MPHAT document.
- ❖ The Helitack Superintendent followed the FMB Wildland Fire Medical and Public Health Advisory Team (MPHAT) document (dated 4/23/2020) on "Preventing the Spread of COVID-19":  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X3RRrjeWLR3G5RqUaUqbspO1UfB2WPM/view>.



The 84 Fire that the Durango Helitack Crew responded to on May 5-6.

## Testing Options

The following options—that are consistent with CDC guidance and MPHAT—were discussed with the sick crewmember.

1. If they will not have a test to determine if they are still contagious, individuals can leave home after these three things have happened:
  - ✓ No fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without the use of medicine that reduces fevers); AND other symptoms have improved; AND at least seven days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
2. If they will be tested to determine if they are still contagious, individuals can leave home after these three things have happened:
  - ✓ They no longer have a fever (without the use medicine that reduces fevers); AND other symptoms have improved; AND they have received two negative tests in a row, 24 hours apart.

### Crewmember's Illness and Testing Chronology

- Crewmember first reports symptoms: **May 6**
- First COVID-19 test: **May 8**
- Second COVID-19 test: **May 9**
- Crewmember receives test results: **May 19**
- Actual test results dated: **May 11** (Clinic took nine days to get test results to the crewmember.)

## Crewmember's Test Results

On May 19, the Helitack crewmember received their two test results back. Both tests were negative for COVID-19. The crewmember self-isolated from their home while waiting for these test results. As mentioned in their personal account, they are feeling better and believe they had allergies and cold symptoms.

This crewmember is still in the same pay status as the rest of the crew. A CA-1, CA-2, CA-16 was discussed being filed—but wasn't. No other crewmembers have reported any symptoms and all appear to be very healthy.

## Lessons

- ❖ The Durango Helitack Crew has a high level of trust in each other, knowing that we are taking care of those around us and self-monitoring our well-being.
- ❖ A well-defined notification system should be established so Duty Officers, Line Officers and various Forest entities are aware of individuals on crews who become sick or ill—to prevent causing a “panic” situation.
- ❖ We shouldn't hit any panic buttons if someone becomes sick. Rather, we need to take the necessary steps with everyone's well-being in mind during these heightened times.
- ❖ Symptoms that look like COVID-19 could well be the flu, a cold or seasonal allergies. But as a Supervisor you have to take the “better safe than sorry” approach if adverse health symptoms do arise.

***Information needs to be quality over quantity. We need to flatten the curve on an overabundance of excessive information that nobody doing their real job has time to read.***

- ❖ Expect an employee to be out for at least 7-14 days in self-isolation if they get symptoms and longer if a COVID-19 test comes back positive. It took 14 days from the crewmember's first symptoms to finding out testing results for this individual.

- ❖ Is our Best Practices actually the Best Practices? In an effort to limit people at the Durango Tanker Base we told a mechanic for the helicopter to stay in town. And when ordered for a fire, a minor mechanical issue occurred, and it took 30 minutes for the mechanic to get back to the Tanker Base to deal with it.
- ❖ Forest Leadership needs to reinforce to their Forestry Technician Fire personnel that regardless of being sick or not, they will be paid for their respective crew's readiness ability as a "Module as One". This can be as simple as knowing your time will have the approved button clicked.
- ❖ COVID-19 information sharing from the WO to RO to SO to DO is at best a fluid mess of forwarded emails, chain emails, conference calls, and Microsoft Team meetings with unmuted participants and all manner of disturbing background sounds.
- ❖ Information needs to be quality over quantity. We need to flatten the curve on an overabundance of excessive information that nobody doing their real job has time to read.

## Questions That Need to be Addressed and Answered

- ❖ What do we do with government housing employees who come down with symptoms? For that matter, SW Colorado is high COLA (Cost-of-Living Adjustment). What about employees who share housing with other people and who may become sick? Are we authorized to put these people into a safer hotel situation and on per diem? What about the 1039s who camp in parking lots and elsewhere? What about local AD Tanker Base Employees?
- ❖ Do we have a blank check on Maintaining a Healthy Workforce in terms of funding?
- ❖ Is there a clear crosswalk for Supervisors and for employees about the reality of being exposed to COVID-19 and how well our agency will really support us? CA-1, CA-2, CA-16 OWCP, how's this going to happen and occur?
- ❖ Two uniquely different Type 1 resources work on the San Juan National Forest. What are the expectations for their respective dispatch futures in terms of being available Local, Regional, and National? Are these levels of expectations going to be reasonable when Preparedness Level 5 occurs? Will we be forced to be mission driven?
- ❖ Honestly, what are we going to do if an employee of ours tests positive? How do we react? How do we respond?




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