



JAMES W. FOLEY LEGACY FOUNDATION

Journalist Resources: Reporting on – and during – the COVID-19 Pandemic

Objective

Journalists reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic need to make sure they are taking every precaution possible to protect themselves, their colleagues, and their sources. Covering any health-related crises presents risks for journalists; this crisis, however, is particularly dangerous, especially since expert knowledge on COVID-19 is still developing. While experts continue to study the virus, journalists can draw upon the knowledge gleaned for past health crises and other disasters to develop their own action plans. It is imperative that journalists take steps to mitigate risk – nothing is more important than staying healthy, physically and emotionally.

Besides health and safety risks, there are other concerns as the effects of COVID-19 change the way stories are covered. During this pandemic, not all journalists are able to work in the field, and even those out in the field may find themselves spending more time secluded indoors filing stories. Several resources below, including from *Online News Association*, provide tips for journalists working from home.

Resources about Covering COVID-19

“CPJ Safety Advisory: Covering the coronavirus outbreak” from *Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)* (Updated: April 6, 2020 – this page is regularly updated)

<https://cpj.org/2020/02/cpj-safety-advisory-covering-the-coronavirus-outbr.php>

CPJ offers this very thorough and easy to digest resource with information and advice for journalists for every step when covering stories during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- Pre-Assignment Planning
- Psychological Well-Being
- Avoiding Infection & Infecting Others
- Equipment Safety
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Face Masks
- Digital & Physical Security on Assignment
- International Travel Assignments
- Post-Assignment
- If You Develop Symptoms

CPJ also provides a link for their Safety Kit for Journalists: <https://cpj.org/safety-kit/>

“Covering COVID-19: Concepts, sources, treatments, and more” by Aldana Vales, *International Journalists’ Network (IJN)* (April 3, 2020)

<https://ijnnet.org/en/story/covering-covid-19-concepts-sources-treatments-and-more>

For this article, Aldana Vales “talked with science journalist Valeria Román as part of the Global Health Crisis Reporting Forum — a project with our parent organization, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ). Román is a member of the [World Federation of Science Journalists](#).”

Additional resources for journalists covering the pandemic: <https://ijnnet.org/en/stories#story:7100>

“U.S. video journalist shares tips for covering COVID-19: ‘We have to get creative’” from *Committee to Protect Journalists* (April 2, 2020)

<https://cpj.org/blog/2020/04/us-video-journalist-shares-tips-for-covering-covid.php>

Washington, DC-based video journalist, Jon Gerberg, answers questions about how he is covering the pandemic. Gerberg was covering Democratic primaries in Detroit in early March and is now reporting from New York City. Gerberg, who has experience covering wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, explains some of the new challenges that journalists are facing when covering the pandemic. Gerberg discusses the precautions he is taking and the increased value of risk assessment when determining what stories to cover.

“Tips for covering the coronavirus from a veteran Wall Street Journal disaster reporter” by Mel Grau, *Poynter* (March 27, 2020)

<https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2020/tips-for-covering-the-coronavirus-from-a-veteran-wall-street-journal-disaster-reporter/>

Mel Grau interviews Erin Ailworth, who covers the Midwest for *The Wall Street Journal* and specializes in covering disasters. Ailworth has covered hurricanes, wildfires, flooding, mudslides, earthquakes and mass shootings. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, is a different kind of disaster. As noted in the article, “Unlike [Ailworth’s] coverage of the Camp Fire or Hurricane Dorian, the pandemic isn’t a disaster you can see out in the field. It’s not cordoned off with yellow tape or circled on a meteorologist’s map. The risk of exposure follows you home.” Ailworth explains how techniques she has employed when covering other disasters apply to covering COVID-19.

There are tips for pre-assignment planning, mental preparation, interviewing people impacted by the pandemic, physical and emotional safety, and the writing process.

“How Journalists Can Deal With Trauma While Reporting on COVID-19” by Olga Simanovych, *Global Investigative Journalism Network* (March 24, 2020)

<https://gijn.org/2020/03/24/how-journalists-can-deal-with-trauma-while-reporting-on-covid-19/>

This article focuses on the well-being of both journalists and sources and serves as a reminder for journalists to not cause additional harm to victims while remaining aware of their personal mental health. Dr. Cait McMahon, director of *Dart Center Asia Pacific*, reminds journalists of the following: “During a natural disaster or outbreak of violence, a journalist — like a psychotherapist — often takes on the role of a witness, who at times may experience a horror, rage and despair that is almost like that of the victim’s.” In the process, a journalist “risks psychological harm at three different stages of his or her work: firstly, as a witness or participant in the event; secondly, while communicating and showing compassion to the victims; and thirdly, by telling their stories — allowing their experiences to pass through the reporter to an audience.” The article prepares journalists to cover the COVID-19 pandemic in three stages of the process:

- **Before: Preparing for a Traumatic Story**
 - Investigative Marathon Plan
 - Checklist for Evaluating Psychological Risk
 - Resilience for Reporters amid Social Distancing
- **During: Working with Traumatic Content**
 - The Body’s Response to Trauma
 - Psychological Self-Defense Measures
- **After: Recovering from Emotional Taxing Stories**
 - Surviving Psychological Trauma

“Media ethics, safety and mental health: reporting in the time of Covid-19” by Hannah Storm, Director, *Ethical Journalism Network* (March 19, 2020)

<https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/media-ethics-safety-and-mental-health-reporting-in-the-time-of-covid-19/amp>

Hannah Storm, director of *EJN*, notes that “nothing compares with the events of recent weeks in terms of the global impact on media around the world of Covid-19 and the unprecedented scale of the story, and the demands it is making on our journalism and on us as journalists.” Storm explains how the pandemic is causing newsrooms and journalists to change decades of work habits in order to effectively cover COVID-19. Storm offers advice based on her experiences, expertise, and interactions with colleagues, including:

1. Responsible and ethical journalism is vital to the reporting of Covid-19

- Avoid sensationalism and scaremongering
- Avoid racial profiling
- Ensure you protect affected people
- Be accurate and report facts
- Seek expert opinions
- Provide context; point people to credible information sources and resources
- Be careful when using maps showing case distribution
- Be cautious of using images of people in masks
- **First Draft News** also compiled the following helpful list, including tips on debunking misinformation: <https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/coronavirus-responsible-reporting-and-ethics/>

2. Stay Physically Safe

- The Committee to Protect Journalists offers the following safety tips: <https://cpj.org/2020/02/cpj-safety-advisory-covering-the-coronavirus-outbr.php>

3. How to Manage Your Mental Health as a Journalist

- Get enough sleep; Eat properly; Avoid excessive alcohol and caffeine
- Take breaks from work, digitally and physically; Switch off news and social media
- It’s normal to feel affected by difficult images or stories
- Go for a walk, if able; If you can’t get outside, consider something else to give yourself a break; Try meditation or mindfulness; Watch a comedy or read a book
- Spend time with family and friends, even remotely. Isolation puts pressure on mental health
- Take time off work: if you are unwell, mentally or physically, don’t be afraid to ask.
- Newsroom managers – lead by example. Be clear about policies and priorities; be as transparent as you can; be aware of those who may be more vulnerable

“Covering COVID-19: Advice from Report for America corps members” by Selin Thomas, *The GroundTruth Project* (March 18, 2020)

<https://thegroundtruthproject.org/covering-covid-19-advice-from-report-for-america-corps-members/>

The GroundTruth Project has several Report for America corps members throughout the country reporting in the field. Corps members ChrisAnna Mink, a former pediatric infectious disease specialist, Wyatt Massey, a religion reporter in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Eleni Gill, a health reporter in Honolulu, explain the work they are doing, how they contextualize the story for their local readers, and the steps they are taking to protect themselves. In emailed responses, each corps member offers the steps they have taken to prepare, how they have adapted their reporting, strategies to avoid causing public panic, and the measures they take to protect themselves.

There are also several links to resources covering a wide range of topics, including self-care, how to work remotely, ethics guidance, data sources, and health and science information about covering the COVID-19 pandemic.

Webinars: Covering the COVID-19 Pandemic

“Reporting and Covid-19: A Webinar Series for Journalists” from *Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma (with Bruce Shapiro)* (March 24 – April 30, 2020)

<https://dartcenter.org/events/2020/03/reporting-and-covid-19-webinar-series-journalists>

Columbia Journalism School’s Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma hosts a series of online conversations about the challenges of reporting amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Led by Dart Center executive director Bruce Shapiro, these conversations take a quick, deep dive with authoritative experts, news innovators and journalistic colleagues navigating the crisis at the local, regional and global level while sharing lessons learned, common struggles and innovative approaches. These talks are co-sponsored by Columbia Journalism Review.

Recorded conversations include: “**Covering Covid-19 on a State and Local Level**” with Irwin Redlener, MD, Director, National Center for Disaster Preparedness, Earth Institute, Columbia University

- Coronavirus is not only a global pandemic – it is a community-level crisis. How can local and regional reporting make a difference? What ground-level indicators and issues should we follow? How can reporters effectively assess local and state-level responses, or accurately cover the pandemic’s impact on families and children?

“**The Day the Pandemic Arrived: Reporting Lessons from America’s First Hotspot**” with Florangela Davila, News Director, KNKX, Seattle

- On January 21, the first case of covid-19 in the U.S. was confirmed in Washington State, and soon Seattle’s journalists found themselves at the center of the coronavirus maelstrom, covering a devastating community outbreak with international consequences while navigating their own safety and ethical concerns. What lessons can Seattle teach news teams in other communities as covid-19 arrives?

“IRE schedules free webinars amid COVID-19 crisis” by Denise Malan, *Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE)* (Multiple Dates)

<https://www.ire.org/covidwebinars>

IRE is offering a series of webinars and recorded trainings to help our members and all journalists in these unprecedented times. **The webinars are free and open to both IRE members and non-member**

journalists. IRE is committed to bringing all journalists the training they need to help cover the crisis and take care of themselves as they inform their communities.

Recording(s) include: “**How journalists can fight stress from covering COVID-19**” with Al Tompkins of *Poynter* and Sidney Tompkins, licensed psychotherapist; hosted by *IRE* Executive Director Doug Haddix

- Al Tompkins of Poynter and Sidney Tompkins, a licensed psychotherapist, have worked with newsrooms to help journalists manage traumatic stress. With nonstop coverage of the coronavirus spread, self-quarantines and economic fallout, journalists are facing an unprecedented amount of stress. Al and Sidney Tompkins give a short presentation and then talk with attendees about the challenges they face and strategies to cope.

“IJNet webinar on 'Journalists' mental health” from *International Journalists' Network* (April 3, 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNtAh4gRBc4&feature=youtu.be>

“Covering trauma, whether major international stories or events much closer to home, can also have an impact on those who do the reporting. To kickstart this conversation, IJNet hosted a webinar on reporting on trauma and journalist self care.” This webinar is hosted by *IJNET* editor, Taylor Mulcahey, and includes Bruce Shapiro, executive director of Columbia University’s Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, and Sherry Ricchiardi, professor of journalism at Indiana University.

Additional Resources (Websites & Newsletters)

“Journalist Toolbox: SARS, Flu, Coronavirus” by Mike Reilley, *Society for Professional Journalists* (Updated Regularly)

https://www.journaliststoolbox.org/2020/04/12/flu_and_miscellaneous_medicalhealth_sites/

The Society of Professional Journalists provides this regularly updated list of resources for covering and responding to Coronavirus, SARS and Flu Resources.

“Covering COVID-19: Resources for Journalists” by *International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)* (Updated Regularly)

<https://www.icfj.org/our-work/covering-covid-19-resources-journalists>

From the *ICFJ* resource page: “So many journalists in ICFJ’s vast network and beyond are debunking misinformation and providing lifesaving coverage on the COVID-19 pandemic....[Y]ou can learn from health professionals and other experts, through a series of webinars on everything from health disinformation to newsroom leadership to the latest research on the disease. You can find new resources on covering COVID-19 on *IJNet*, the go-to site for journalism tips, trends and opportunities, in seven languages....And you can explore cutting-edge research on journalism and COVID-19 being conducted by *ICFJ*.”

COVID-19: Poynter Resources (Daily Newsletters)

<https://www.poynter.org/covid-19-poynter-resources/>

Poynter’s mission is to champion the duty of a free press to inform, educate and hold the powerful accountable. As the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, journalists, fact-checkers, educators and students around the world look to Poynter for best practices in covering the most significant story of this generation. **Poynter also offers journalists the opportunity to sign up for free, real-time chats with Poynter experts.**

Columbia Journalism Review. (Daily & Weekly Newsletters)

<https://www.cjr.org/email>

Columbia Journalism Review offers **The Media Today**, a daily email providing brief commentary on the biggest media story of the day, plus a roundup of notable pieces, and **Top Stories**, a weekly digest of CJR's most popular stories, along with editors' picks from around the media. There is also a weekly **Tow Center COVID-19 Newsletter**, which tracks news of the virus through research and analysis.

Global Health NOW, *Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health* (Free Weekday Newsletter)

<https://www.globalhealthnow.org/subscribe>

Global Health NOW is an essential daily read for anyone interested in US and global public health. Every weekday, Global Health NOW aggregates and summarizes the latest global health news—delivering critical stories to each subscriber's inbox.

NiemanLab (Daily Email Update)

<https://www.niemanlab.org/subscribe/>

According to their website, "The Nieman Journalism Lab is an attempt to help journalism figure out its future in an Internet age.... We want to highlight attempts at innovation and figure out what makes them succeed or fail. We want to find good ideas for others to steal. We want to help reporters and editors adjust to their online labors; we want to help traditional news organizations find a way to survive; we want to help the new crop of startups that will complement — or supplant — them."

Additional Resources (Working from home during COVID-19)

"How journalists can work from home securely" from *Freedom of the Press Foundation* (March 18, 2020)

<https://freedom.press/training/blog/wfh-securely/>

This resource examines systemic changes journalism faces due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of this is on the importance of digital safety for newsrooms and for individuals working from home.

"Tips and ideas for working from home" Trevor Knoblich, *Online News Association* (Mar. 17, 2020)

https://journalists.org/2020/03/17/tips-and-ideas-for-working-from-home/?utm_source=Online+News+Association+List&utm_campaign=2e79c293ed-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_17_07_58&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_53b827990a-2e79c293ed-225942913

ONA, working off its own hybrid telecommuting model (Mondays and Wednesdays in the office, and the remaining business days at home), provides tips and strategies for journalists who may be working from home for the first time (or for the first time in a while). Included are tips for finding the right tools to work with, managing expectations, staying connected, and balancing work and home.

Additional Resources (Press Freedom)

"Press freedom and government transparency during COVID-19" from *Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (RCFP)* (March 2020)

<https://www.rcfp.org/resources/covid-19/>

Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press seeks to protect the rights of journalists. RCFP is "tracking government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and their effects on press and public access to information, records, meetings, and more." An online form is provided for journalists to document any access issues they may have. In addition, RCFP answers FAQs about the following: **Emergency Powers and the Press; Open Meetings and Public Records; and Court Access**