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Ministry of Public Security  
Strategy Directorate  
Information & Knowledge Services

**-Unclassified-**

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## Summary of the Ministry of Public Security's Activity

### Combatting the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Israel

June 2020

*This report refers to the coronavirus crisis period between late February 2020 and early May 2020. The Ministry and its operational bodies – the Israel Police, Israel Prison Service and Israel Fire and Rescue Authority – are continuing to adapt their activity to national health guidelines and to the new routine necessitated by efforts to combat the coronavirus. The report also addresses the activity of the Israel Authority for Prevention of Violence, Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the National Child Online Protection Bureau (105), which worked under the Ministry.*



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Israel Police



Israel Prison Service



Israel Fire and Rescue

## Main points of the Ministry of Public Security's activity

- **Coordinating and integrating** the activity of the Ministry's operational bodies, to manage the efforts to confront the emergency event on a national level in accordance with the minister's policy
- **Advancing legal tools** to regulate the activity of the Ministry and its operational bodies as part of the national effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Israel
- Preventing the spread of the virus in **prisons and detention facilities**
- **Maintaining community resilience** and preventing risk-taking behavior
- **Collaborations and integration** with other government ministries in terms of information, knowledge and policy and strategic planning to combat the coronavirus
- **Preserving continuity of operations** and adapting the Ministry's services in the course of the emergency situation

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## **The Ministry of Public Security**

The Ministry of Public Security works to implement the policy set by the Minister and the government so as to manage the efforts to confront the emergency event on a national level. In this context, the Ministry works to: advance legal tools to regulate the activity required of the Ministry and its operational bodies as part of the national effort to curb the spread of the virus; integrate and coordinate the work of the operational bodies with security agencies and government ministries; oversee and monitor the activity of the Ministry and its operational bodies; present an updated situational picture to the Minister; plan policy and strategy and draw up recommendations for the Minister; conduct public information and communications and promote regulatory easements in Ministry services for the benefit of the citizens, including digital solutions to facilitate provision of service during this period.

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#### **Working in emergency mode:**

The Emergency Division is in charge of the emergency preparations and activity of the Ministry of Public Security, including its operational bodies and emergency apparatuses, as well as inter-organizational, systemic coordination with other emergency agencies and government ministries.



The Division is part of the crisis management team in national-level forums, and works with the National Security Council and the government. The Emergency Division manages the public security desk in the National Crisis Management Center, and coordinates the continuity of operations and the handling of essential service providers by the Ministry and its operational bodies during the crisis. The Emergency Division and the Security Secretariat led the discussions by the Minister of Public Security on preparation for emergency situations in the course of the crisis.

#### **Daily situational picture on public security:**

During the coronavirus period, a daily situational picture was assembled with the assistance of the Strategy Directorate.



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**Legal arrangements:**

The Legal Advisor's Office works to advance and formulate the legal tools required as part of the national effort to curb the spread of the virus. To this end, it has advanced emergency regulations, government resolutions and primary legislation initiatives, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and other agencies.

The legal tools advanced by the Ministry or in cooperation with it during this period include the following:

- **Emergency regulations for enforcing restrictions on movement and commerce**, to be enforced by police, municipal inspectors and other civil servants empowered to conduct supervision
- Assigning responsibility to the Israel Police for **supervision and enforcement of quarantine requirements for people returning from abroad**, with the assistance of 250 inspectors from the Population and Immigration Authority
- **Emergency regulations on detention and prison arrangements** – barring visitors from detention and prison facilities, enabling remand hearings to be conducted by remote technology, and enabling special leave for inmates with up to 30 days remaining to their sentences
- **Emergency regulations for expanding the electronic monitoring program** by an additional 250 offenders, from 750 to a total of 1,000, to reduce the number of inmates in prison facilities



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**Strategy:**



Forming **strategic deliberation teams** consisting of position holders, retired senior officials and experts in the field



Examining **technological solutions** to assist the public security forces during the COVID-19 crisis and afterwards



**Planning teams** on management of public security tasks during the “**new routine**” period of living alongside the virus and afterwards



**Maintaining ties** with public security ministries worldwide



**Developing information and knowledge:** Preparing close to 25 information briefs and background papers about the activity of public security agencies around the world for confronting the coronavirus

**Technological response:**

- **IT Division:** Provided technological and digital solutions that enabled the Ministry and its operational bodies to continue their activity while observing social distancing guidelines, including finding solutions for remote work and conducting online meetings (Zoom meetings and videoconferences)
- The **Security, Information and Cyber-Security Division** worked to enable this activity while protecting the Ministry's infrastructure and information security. The division performed cyber resilience tests for the public security bodies, issued guidelines and raised employees'

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awareness for phishing attacks taking place in the context of the coronavirus crisis, and emphasized the importance of exercising caution in remote work.



**Firearm licensing:**

The Firearm Licensing Department carried out various adjustments and easements during this period, including the following:

- **Firearm licenses** due to expire between March 10, 2020 and May 10, 2020 were extended by two months
- Carrying out various services, such as change of ownership, **without requiring license holders to come to the firearm licensing bureaus** in person
- **Guidelines for security firms:** Storage of firearms for security guards in quarantine; transferring security guards and firearms between districts; and storage of firearms for security guards on vacation or unpaid leave.



## Israel Authority for Prevention of Violence, Alcohol and Drug Abuse – Community Safety

The Authority<sup>1</sup> adapted its work patterns to the COVID-19 crisis. Among other things, it conducted a daily situation assessment meeting and formed a crisis management team, which included professionals and field workers. The Authority's significant presence in the field enabled it to identify trends that emerged due to the crisis – such as increased probability of domestic violence incidents, increased risk-taking behavior by adolescents, and larger numbers of neighbor disputes – and provide a professional response to the events in the field.



The Authority assisted local authorities in promoting prevention programs and supported dialogue processes between the police and populations with unique characteristics. Police social workers were declared essential workers and continued to operate during the crisis. Assistance was also provided to disengaged youth and homeless people.



<sup>1</sup> As part of the coalition agreements for the new government formed on May 17, 2020, it was decided to move the Israel Authority for Prevention of Violence, Alcohol and Drug Abuse – Community Safety from the Ministry of Public Security to the newly-formed Ministry for Community Empowerment and Advancement.

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The Authority produced and distributed public information materials and professional resources for the use of the professional staff in the field, parents and communities. The materials included video clips in Hebrew and Arabic for parents, teenagers and the community at large, documents for local directors in Hebrew and Arabic on issues such as domestic violence, mediation and adolescents, and information posters for Jewish, Christian and Muslim holidays.



### Municipal Policing program

The emergency regulations empowered police officers and municipal inspectors operating within the Municipal Policing program to enforce administrative offenses subject to fines, including:



- Violating a quarantine requirement
- Violating a reporting requirement to the Ministry of Health
- Spending time in the public space in contravention of regulations
- Operating a venue or business in contravention of regulations.

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## National Child Online Protection Bureau (105)

During the coronavirus crisis, while social distancing guidelines were in effect, children were at home and spent long hours in front of screens. During this period:

- **The 105 hotline** continued to provide a 24/7 response to callers
- The National Child Online Protection Bureau (105)<sup>2</sup> conducted **online meetings** for children, parents and professionals
- The bureau issued **special reports** on video messaging and conferencing apps
- Extensive **public education and information materials** were distributed on social media platforms, including two special guides on the following topics:
  - **Safeguarding privacy during distance learning** (with the Ministry of Justice)
  - Tips for **smart and safe use of the Zoom app** (with the National Cyber Directorate)

During the coronavirus period, a significant increase was recorded in the number of incidents in which minors were harassed or harmed on group calls held via video applications.



<sup>2</sup> As part of the coalition agreements for the new government formed on May 17, 2020, it was decided to move the National Child Online Protection Bureau (105) from the Ministry of Public Security to the newly-formed Ministry for Community Empowerment and Advancement.

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## Israel Police

The Israel Police has stood at the forefront of the effort to combat the coronavirus (COVID-19), and works to enforce the provisions of the **People's Health Order and the emergency regulations**, with the aim of protecting the public's



health and safety and enforcing public law and order. Along with this, the Israel Police continues to perform its regular tasks for crime prevention, traffic enforcement and maintaining public order as in routine times. During this period, a special emphasis has been placed on **prevention of domestic violence**. For the first time, **complaints can now be filed online**, to avoid having to come to the police station in person.

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#### **Enforcement:**

The Israel Police works to enforce the provisions of the People's Health Order and the emergency regulations for restricting movement and commercial activity, and to enforce restrictions on movement in areas declared as restricted areas by the emergency regulations.

Enforcement was carried out, among other means, by issuing warnings and tickets (over 50,000 were issued).

In addition, a special challenge was posed by the holidays: the Israel Police worked to enforce restrictions on movement during the Passover holiday, the Mimouna festival and the month of Ramadan, and to enforce restrictions on going out into the public space in the course of Independence Day.



The Israel Police was assisted in the enforcement efforts by inspectors and enforcement units from other government ministries.

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#### **Communications and public information:**

The Israel Police engages in public information activity for the purpose of helping people observe the guidelines and instructions, and to answer questions that arise from the public as a result of the guidelines, such as: When can I leave the house? Can I go outside for sports activity? Do I have to wear a face mask?

In addition, the police warned against dissemination of fake news on social media and ensured the removal of false posts.

#### **Online services:**

Filing complaints with the police online – the service enables people to make a report online without coming to the police station, in order to avoid a health risk.

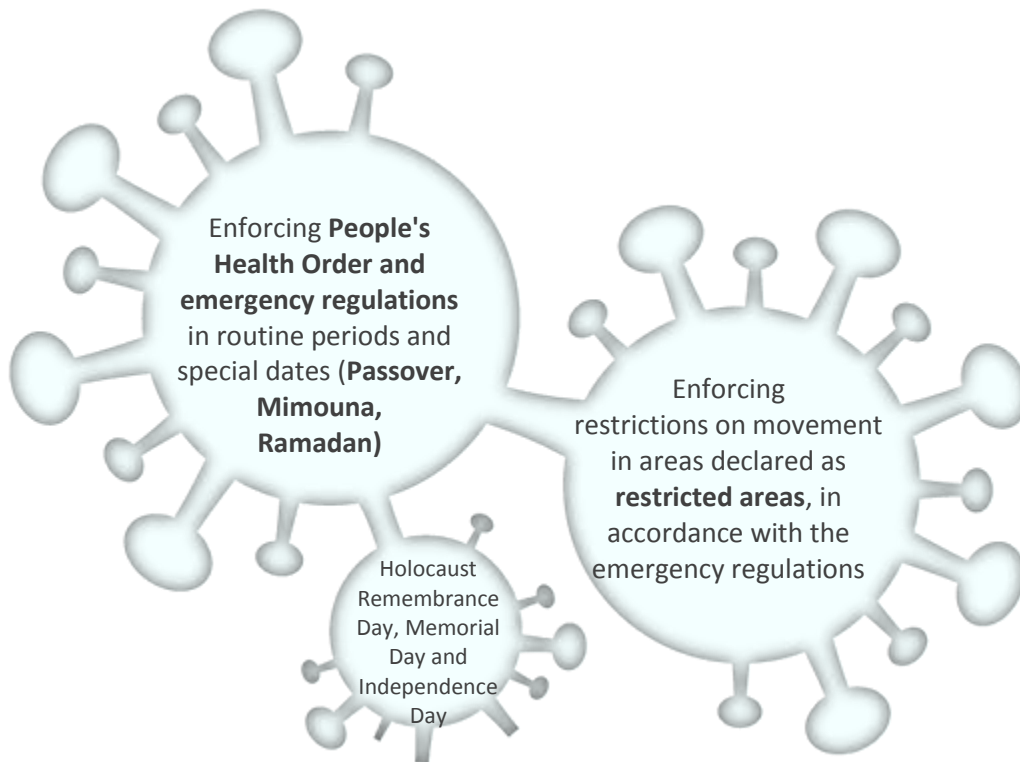




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**Challenges:**

- Enforcing restrictions on movement in areas declared as **restricted areas**, in accordance with the emergency regulations, including: Bnei Brak, certain neighborhoods of Jerusalem, Deir al-Asad, Beit Shemesh and Netivot
- Enforcing the provisions of the People's Health Order and the emergency regulations in routine periods and special dates: the **Passover** holiday, the **Mimouna** festival and the month of **Ramadan**
- Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day

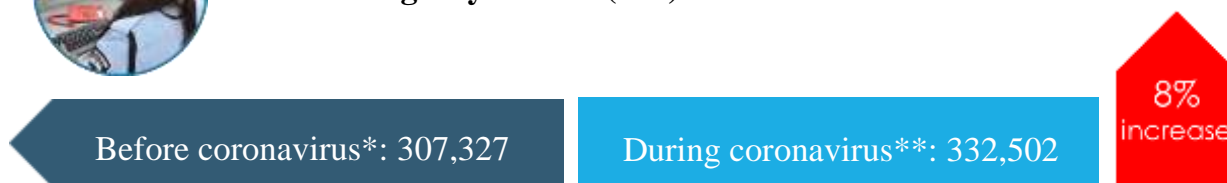




## Trends in Policing – COVID-19



### Police emergency hotline (100) incidents:<sup>3</sup>



\* Monthly average for the months November 2019-February 2020

\*\* March 1-April 15, 2020

### Breakdown of calls to the hotline:

Sex offenses: **decrease of 18%**  
Security: **decrease of 4%**  
Property offenses: **decrease of 23%**  
Drugs and alcohol: **decrease of 24%**  
Traffic: **decrease of 42%**



Noise: **increase of 89%**  
Violence (non-domestic): **increase of 12%**  
Domestic violence: **increase of 31%**  
Assistance to authorized official: **increase of 517%**

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the hotline reporting system was changed during this period, including reclassification of some types of incidents, and therefore it was not possible to compare the COVID-19 period to the equivalent period in 2019.



**Reported crime incidents:<sup>4</sup>**



\* All data are presented on a nationwide level and in comparison to the coronavirus period

\*\* March 1 – April 15, 2020

Prevention: **decrease of 23%**  
Use of vehicle without permission: **decrease of 37%**  
Break-in to apartment: **decrease of 54%**  
Break-in to business: **decrease of 5%**  
Violence (non-domestic): **decrease of 18%**

Domestic violence: **increase of 13%**



<sup>4</sup> Data on reported crime incidents are based on the date of opening an official complaint. It should be noted that the COVID-19 period includes the Passover holiday, and there may be complaints that were submitted during this period but not officially filed until afterwards.



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**Data on enforcement activity – coronavirus period\*** (number of tickets issued):

\* March 19-May 3, 2020

Going out into the public space in contravention of regulations – 44,299

Spending time in a prohibited location – 6,614

Disobeying a police officer's instructions to disperse/assembling – 1,260

Conducting prayer in contravention of regulations – 1,309

Prohibition on conducting a wedding event in the public space – 391

Opening a prohibited business/shop/repair workshop – 1,344

Failure to wear/carry a face mask – 1,391

Requirement of an owner or operator of a venue not to give service to a person not wearing a face mask – 12

Operating a clinic for aesthetic treatments – 1



**Supervising implementation of Ministry of Health instructions:**

Total supervision and monitoring of people in home quarantine – 105,614

Supervision of people in home hospitalization (coronavirus patients) – 20,233

Phone calls to people returning from abroad who did not report home quarantine – 32,306



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Total number of business establishments checked – 292,336

**Status of enforcement activity of joint Ministry of Health and  
Environmental Protection Section team\***

\* Cumulative data from March 8, 2020

Home visits of people in quarantine – 2,097

Inspection of verified coronavirus patients – 354

Phone contact – 3,202

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## Israel Prison Service

The mission of the Israel Prison Service (IPS) is to provide safe and proper custody for the inmates under its jurisdiction.

The goal set by the IPS during the period of the coronavirus crisis was to prevent the penetration of the virus and its outbreak in prisons.

There are no inmates in IPS facilities who contracted the coronavirus while under IPS custody (as of May 13, 2020).

The IPS is responsible for the lives of about 18,000 inmates, inside and outside prison walls.

The IPS was required to take many measures in order to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the inmates and prison staff, while balancing this aim with the preservation of their legal rights and maintaining transparency in reports to the Israeli and foreign media with regard to the events behind prison walls.

In a global perspective, the Israel Prison Service is among the few prison services worldwide that succeeded in preventing the penetration of the virus into prisons. In several countries around the world, prisons became infected areas in which there were also deaths among the inmates and staff.



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#### Challenges:

The cells in prison facilities throughout Israel are small areas with a high population density, including inmates belonging to high-risk groups due to their advanced age and pre-existing conditions. All these turned the global coronavirus crisis into one of the most complex events ever faced by the IPS.

Even before social distancing legislation was passed on a national level, the IPS adopted a strategic policy anchored in the emergency regulations and resolutions, along with broad-based staff work and a risk management policy, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the National Security Council, the Public Defense Office, the Directorate of Courts and other organizations in Israel and worldwide, as follows:

- **Entry to prisons** was barred
- Every new inmate was held in a **screening cell** for 14 days before entering an ordinary cell block
- **No visits** were held by inmates' families
- **No leaves** were approved
- **Consultation with attorneys** was only permitted by phone
- **Court hearings on extension of remand** were conducted via videoconference platforms
- 540 criminal inmates (the remainder of whose sentence did not exceed 30 days, and who were not serving a sentence for sexual offenses or



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domestic violence offenses) were put on **special leave**, for the purpose of mitigating the risk in prisons in accordance with the emergency regulations.

- In accordance with the emergency regulations, the **electronic monitoring program** was expanded from 750 to a quota of 1,000 supervised offenders, in order to reduce the number of inmates incarcerated in prisons.
- **The Saharonim prison** was completely cleared of its occupants and made ready to receive future patients.
- In each district, **dedicated cellblocks** were cleared of their occupants and made ready to receive future patients.
- **Sanitation materials and soap** were distributed to all inmates.
- All cellblocks and public areas in the prisons were **sanitized** on a daily basis.
- Single-use and reusable **face masks** were distributed to all inmates.
- **Telemedicine services** were expanded in all prison facilities in Israel.
- The **canteen deposit amount** was increased for criminal inmates by several hundred shekels per month.
- A **financial aid fund** was set up for criminal inmates in need.
- **Logistics equipment**, food and medicines for several months were purchased for inmates.



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- The **telephone call quota** was expanded for criminal inmates and the hours in which calls can be made were extended.
- **Video calls** were held by inmates with their families before holidays (of all religions).
- **Educational and information materials** were posted in all cellblocks, and information videos in multiple languages were screened for inmates in their cells.
- **Focus Radio:** Throughout this period, the prison radio station broadcast calming messages, explanations and guidelines for inmates.
- **The IPS continued to provide an educational-therapeutic response,** along with religious and medical services, for the purpose of maintaining a treatment continuum for the benefit of pre-release inmates, by means of professional officers in prisons.
- **Classrooms** were operated for criminal inmates, women and minors in educational centers, in a scaled-down format, by education officers in prisons.
- **Employment workshops** were operated in accordance with Ministry of Health guidelines.



**Changes in behavior of prison staff:**

- Transition to working in week-long shifts

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- Setting up screening tents at the entrance to prisons
- Taking the temperature of each prison guard and signing a health declaration
- Wearing a face mask within cellblocks and in any interaction with inmates, in accordance with guidelines
- All prison personnel were briefed to provide a tolerant response and to create a sense of safety and protection among the incarcerated inmates
- IPS medical teams led with high professionalism the organization's staff and inmates to safeguard their health in accordance with guidelines
- Managing an emergency routine remotely

#### **Legal proceedings by videoconference**

To prevent exposure of inmates to the virus during travel to and from court, emergency regulations were enacted enabling hearings in criminal proceedings to be conducted by technological means (videoconferencing).

Within days, the IPS Technology Directorate put into place a nationwide infrastructure for holding videoconference calls with the courts.



12,874 hearings were held in 32 prison facilities. 131 parole board hearings were held. (as of May 5, 2020)

#### **Coronavirus testing**

The IPS was assigned high priority for tests to locate and identify the coronavirus, and tests are carried out every day on a sample of inmates and



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staff. All tests returned negative results – attesting to the fact that there was no coronavirus outbreak in prisons in the course of the crisis.

**Education and information for inmates and staff:**

Posters were hung on the importance of maintaining hygiene, and guidelines were issued for inmates and staff. This was done, among other things, by producing 12 information videos, and broadcasting them in multiple languages to all inmates:



- Presenting a situational picture of the virus in Israel and worldwide and the IPS's methods of confronting the virus
- Rules for maintaining hygiene and Ministry of Health guidelines
- Supportive messages for inmates from community agencies – Public Defense Office, Israel Bar Association, Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority and more
- Spiritual support by clerics of all religions
- A total of 58 information videos and podcasts were produced and broadcast to the staff on all digital platforms: professional tips for commanders, support videos for staff, encouraging videos from family members, professional tips for coping with emergency situations and more.

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#### **IPS mobilized for the national effort to combat the epidemic:**

The employment program worked in double shifts, and inmates in prisons from around the country manufactured **over one million protective goggles** and sewed **over 100,000** reusable face masks. Orders have also been placed for manufacturing hundreds of thousands of additional face masks for security and medical personnel.



#### **Community ties:**

The IPS distributed hundreds of face masks to vulnerable populations (senior citizens, residents of domestic violence shelters, special needs populations). Dozens of prison guards spent a number of days helping to pick fruit in farms around the country, in cooperation with the HaShomer HaChadash organization.

#### **Media and international relations:**

- Statements were issued to all media outlets describing in a transparent manner each stage in the organization's effort to combat the virus, and debunking fake news on a daily basis.
- The IPS published photos from within prisons with full transparency throughout this period, and maintained contact with the local and foreign media, in coordination with various government ministries and security organizations.

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- The IPS initiated a thinking forum of prison services from around the world, and a number of conversations were held by the acting IPS Commissioner with his foreign counterparts.
- The acting IPS Commissioner initiated a number of forums of senior position holders in Israel and around the world to examine the most effective ways of confronting the epidemic, with lessons learned from other countries.



## Israel Fire and Rescue

The Israel Fire and Rescue Authority is in charge of preventing and fighting fires and preventing their spread, as well as search and rescue operations and handling hazardous materials events. Fire and Rescue Commissioner, Inspector General Dedi Simhi, instructed the firefighting services to assist with all the tools at their disposal in the national effort to combat the coronavirus.



### **Deployment of firefighting services and their contribution to the effort to combat the coronavirus:**

Within the national effort to combat the coronavirus, fire fighters performed over 300 cleansing and sanitization missions in hospitals, prisons, retirement homes and drive-through testing sites, as well as MDA stations (Israel EMS) and other public areas.

The firefighting services adjusted their activity in various ways to reduce the risk of infection with the coronavirus: working in organic teams (“capsules”), isolating the operational units, logistic preparations – and of course, strictly



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observing the necessary hygiene and social distancing rules. All this was done with the aim of preserving the continuity of operational activity and preventing the infection of fire fighters at stations.

During the coronavirus period, the fire fighters continued to engage in their operational activity, in which they were called upon to handle incidents that posed a risk of infection with the virus: road accidents, rescues from elevators and fires inside buildings in which they had to employ special techniques adapted to the restrictions stemming from the coronavirus outbreak.

Along with the operational activity, the fire fighters mobilized on behalf of the community, for example, by distributing food baskets for the Passover holiday and various actions to boost the national morale.



**Providing a response on business, property and building licensing:**

**National Call Center (\*4964):** Due to the restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 epidemic, no proactive fire inspections are conducted, and fire protection offices are closed to the public. For this reason, a national service call center was opened to provide information on business, property and building licensing. The call center operates Sunday through Thursday, between 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM.

In addition, a series of **regulatory easements** were given to the business sector, in accordance with the government's policy, including postponement of



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business licensing fees and refraining from conducting inspections during the coronavirus period.

**Life-saving public education and information for the population and firefighting personnel:**

The Information and Population Guidance Branch mobilized for the public education and information task, to strengthen the national resilience during this challenging time. The branch's work was divided into two main tiers: within the organization and outside the organization. The messages were adapted to the various sectors: Jewish, ultra-Orthodox, non-Jewish; and in different languages: Hebrew, Arabic and Yiddish. In addition, the messages were adapted for various target groups such as children, adults and the elderly.



\* This document is an abbreviated translation of "עיקרי פעילות המשרד לביטחון הפנים – קורונה" written in Hebrew by the Israeli Ministry of Public Security.

Link to Hebrew document: [https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/reports/corona-summary--report/he/publications\\_mops-operations-coronavirus.pdf](https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/reports/corona-summary--report/he/publications_mops-operations-coronavirus.pdf)

\*\* All information in this document is accurate as of May 15, 2020