

National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS)

Coding Information for the National COVID-19 Special Study (ID #9244)

General

The U. S. Fire Administration (USFA) is conducting *the National NFIRS COVID-19 Special Study* (a.k.a., the Special Study). The Special Study is looking to determine whether COVID-19 was, or was not, a factor in any incident response by the fire service. In most cases, the Special Study is going to be centered around a person, typically a person involved or a patient. A sick bystander or family-member at the scene could alter the response. The Special Study question asks about the impact on the entire incident, independent of the incident type. Some of the frequently asked questions regarding the study are as follows.

Is the Special Study a plus-one code? Should we create plus-one codes for COVID-19 incidents?

The Special Study is not a plus-one code; it is a separate section (Supplemental Form 1S - Section E3) of the NFIRS Basic Module. Since COVID-19 interactions can occur at various types of call responses, there is no single incident type code that can capture all instances of COVID-19 encounters.

A plus-one code should not be created for the National Special Study's codes 1 – 4.

If there is a factor the state or a department wishes to capture based on a national length code in another field, a plus-one code can be created. Refer to the NFIRSGram, [Use of Plus-one Codes](#), on the USFA NFIRS website: <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/nfirs/support/training.html>, or contact your state NFIRS program manager or the NFIRS Support Center.

Is the Special Study required or mandatory?

The Special Study is voluntary but strongly encouraged. This Special Study data is not validated and does not make an incident invalid, and the record must be in the proper format.



I use a third-party vendor software. How do I participate in this Special Study?

All vendors have been contacted and provided specific information about this Special Study, and many vendors have already deployed, or are currently working on deploying the study in their software. If the Special Study is not immediately apparent in your software, please contact your software vendor to assist.

When you export your incidents from your vendor software, your exported data file must include the Special Study record and its data. The Special Study will be part of the incident when submitted (imported) to the NFIRS national database by you or your state.

This Special Study was released in March. Can I go back and add the Special Study responses in incidents that occurred before the release?

Absolutely, in fact, it is encouraged. The start date of this Special Study was January 1, 2020. Incidents in NFIRS can be updated as new information is obtained. Since this pandemic started earlier this year, the incident can be updated if applicable. It is recommended that a note is made in the Remarks section advising of the change to the report.

Is there a penalty for not using the Special Study?

There is no mandate or penalty from the USFA; however, some states are requiring its use. It is recommended that you speak with your state NFIRS program manager (<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/pocs/>) if you are unsure.

Does the Special Study apply to every single incident type reported to NFIRS (e.g., Incident Type 321 and fire related incident types)?

Each incident has the potential for a COVID-19 exposure; therefore, it should be used on all incident types. The Special Study should be used on every incident including those incidents in which COVID-19 was not a factor or unknown. There is no prerequisite for inclusion of the Special Study.

What is the difference between codes 3 and 4?

Code 3 (No, COVID-19 was not a factor) would be used in the event of a COVID-19 negative person involved, patient, or encounter. For example, if the fire department was dispatched to clean up after a vehicle collision and there was no person involved or patient, therefore no contact, the Special Study would be coded as a three (3).



Code 4 (Unknown) would be used if the presence or impact of COVID-19 on the incident is simply not known. This could include an asymptomatic person involved in the incident.

Should we only fill-in the Special Study if Codes 1 or 2 fit?

No, if the Special Study is used, it should be used for all incidents, not just those that could be coded as 1 or 2. This prevents inaccurate or skewed data when analyzing the Special Study results.

How do we use the Special Study with calls that are canceled en route?

When reporting an incident with Incident Type 611, Canceled en route, the best response in the Special Study is code 3, COVID-19 was not a factor. This is the appropriate response because there was no interaction between the fire department and a potential patient. In the Basic Module, enter the Actions Taken Code 93, for Canceled en route.

Our department responded to a call where COVID-19 was suspected or confirmed. Several personnel went to the scene. How do we report that accurately in the Basic and Fire Service Casualty modules?

If multiple fire service personnel are on the scene of an incident where COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed, the personnel in the immediate area of the suspected or confirmed COVID-19 individual can be considered health exposures for NFIRS reporting. This allows the fire service personnel to be counted as fire service injuries in Block H1 of the Basic Module. A Fire Service Casualty Module should be completed for each fire service member exposed and recorded as a fire service exposure (Block G3: Severity code 1, Report only, including exposure).

Example: An engine company with a crew of four (4) arrives to an incident scene to provide manpower assistance to an ambulance with a COVID-19 confirmed patient. Two members of the engine company assist the ambulance crew, while the other two control traffic. In this case, the COVID-19 Special Study would be set to a value of 2 (Yes, COVID-19 was a confirmed factor in this incident); two (2) would be entered as fire service Injuries (i.e., health exposures) in Block H1 on the Basic Module, and two (2) Fire Service Casualty Modules would be completed and coded as health exposures in G3 Severity field (code 1, Report only, including exposure). For the Special Study code, enter code 1 (Yes, COVID 19 was confirmed).

If a firefighter tests positive to COVID-19, is this an NFIRS incident by itself?

No, in NFIRS, fire service casualties are reported if the firefighter was **on duty**. The firefighter with confirmed COVID-19 must be linked to an exposure or hazard encountered while **on duty**.



If a firefighter was **off duty**, felt ill, went to the doctor, and tested positive for COVID-19, **the illness would not be documented in NFIRS unless** the firefighter's exposure can be linked to a person with COVID-19 that the firefighter came in contact with while on duty.

If one of our firefighters or staff members tests positive for COVID-19 and the firefighter is reasonably certain that the contraction was due to incident response, do we need to create a non-run related NFIRS report that shows the firefighter injury? How do we do this – what codes do we use and what fields need to be completed?”

This situation would be treated as any other fire service exposure. You could create an incident, likely an EMS incident, and enter the address of the fire department; enter one Fire Service Casualty and add the Fire Service Casualty Module for the exposed firefighter. You will be required to fill-in all required Basic Module fields, entering the injury in the Casualties section, as well as completing the Fire Service Casualty Module for each casualty. For the Special Study, code 1, Yes, COVID-19 was suspected, could be used.

If a firefighter is injured or exposed to a hazardous substance (e.g., COVID-19) while **on duty**, and if the injury or exposure is not part of an ongoing incident, the injury or exposure initiates the creation of the incident. When the on-duty injury creates an incident, the Basic Module and the Fire Service Casualty Module are completed. This NFIRS rule has been in place since the start of NFIRS 5.0. The incident type would most likely be in the 300 EMS category, e.g., 321. If the incident is COVID-19 related, the National NFIRS COVID-19 Special Study should be completed. Anytime the facts of an incident change, the incident report should be updated to reflect those changes.

Can we report on the status or lack of PPE such as lack of N95 masks, suits, or disposable gloves?

On the Fire Service Casualty Module, protective equipment sections (Sections K1-K4) apply ONLY when reporting failure or a problem with the PPE that contributed to the firefighter injury.

The Basic Module's Remarks narrative can be used for PPE details, (such as the type N95 mask), availability, and use.

Can I change my COVID-19 Special Study choice after I have submitted my report to NFIRS?

As always, an incident's data and status can be updated after it is submitted to the NFIRS national database. It should be **updated and resubmitted** to ensure that the incident is accurate and complete in NFIRS.



How can I monitor and run reports on the COVID-19 Special Study data with my incidents?

The USFA has developed COVID-19 reports that can be run in the NFIRS Data Warehouse (DW) so that the fire service can determine how COVID-19 has impacted their departments. Users can access the NFIRS DW with appropriate permissions. Please contact your state NFIRS program manager (<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/pocs/>) to request accounts, permissions, and assistance.

Is the Special Study title going to be updated?

It is unlikely that there will be an update to how the Special Study is titled. The specific title is not critical but should be consistent with the recommendations from the USFA. We have spoken to numerous vendors and reiterated the same. The crucial point is that the Special Study ID and its codes remain unchanged.

Should we use the Special Study? What is the benefit for our department?

Yes. The USFA strongly recommends the inclusion of the Special Study for all incidents. The collection of this data is invaluable in determining the pandemic's impact to the fire service, locally, regionally, and nationally.

In addition to using the USFA's Special Study for COVID-19, states and fire departments can set up their own special studies in the NFIRS national database (and similarly, plus-one codes). The data can be used at the state and local levels. Additional studies (or plus-one codes) should be carefully planned and defined for meaningful data and coordinated with the state NFIRS program manager. Contact the NFIRS Support Center for initial guidance on special studies or plus-one codes that will be recognized ("defined" with your descriptions) when imported to NFIRS.

If you have additional questions, please contact the NFIRS Support Center
fema-nfirshelp@fema.dhs.gov | 888-382-3827

We are here to assist you, to improve the data submitted to NFIRS,
and to make NFIRS useful to your department and your state.