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Cops will be told if a residence has a coronavirus patient, N.J. attorney general says

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New Jersey health officials must tell cops where people who've tested positive for the coronavirus live, but names will be excluded and the information will be closely protected, according to a directive released Thursday by state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal.

Addresses may only be accessed to respond to service calls. The information may not be shared elsewhere, and may not be used to refuse service, according to the directive.

This knowledge will protect officers, especially in the face of equipment shortages, the directive said.

"By alerting officers as to these risks, we enable them to guard their own health and make the best possible use of our limited supplies of personal protective gear," Grewal said in a statement. "Make no mistake, our officers will respond to every call for service, regardless of the threat."

On Wednesday, the health department told employees to share the addresses of people who have tested positive for COVID-19, according to a news release.

One person at each police department should enter those addresses into a Computer Aided Dispatch system. Officers will only be told about an address if they're responding to a call there, and they may only use it "for the limited purpose of protecting their health and safety, and the health and safety of other officers," the directive said.

"The address is good enough for us and we appreciate the heads up for our officers," Pat Colligan, president of the state Police Benevolent Association, wrote in a message.

The state's Emergency Health Powers Act allows addresses to be shared, with limitations. The order ends when the health department stops sharing the information, by revoking its Wednesday order.

An earlier directive advised cops about how to handle possible staff shortages if officers contract the virus. Departments are limiting face-to-face contact, and some police academies are still training recruits.