



CORONAVIRUS

Precautions for Handling and Disposal of Dead Bodies

This information sheet is to advise workers potentially exposed to material including body fluids from a confirmed COVID-19 infection on a rational approach to prevention. It also aids in deciding if a post-mortem examination is appropriate on a possible COVID-19 death and to advise on the possible risks associated and recommendations on how to reduce these risks. In general, if a death is due to confirmed COVID-19 infection, there is unlikely a need for a post-mortem examination and the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death should be issued.

RISK GROUPS

COVID-19 infections could be transmitted from deceased bodies during hand-over, dissection, evisceration, reconstruction, viewing, handling and embalming.

Risk groups include:

- Health workers
- Mortuary workers
- Pathologists & trainees
- Funeral workers
- Emergency medical services

AT RISK WORKERS

- Smokers
- Immunocompromised workers
- Chronic Lung Diseases, including TB, Asthma and COPD
- Auto Immune Diseases of any kind
- Chronic Kidney Diseases
- Cancer, Diabetes
- HIV +ve with low CD4 count

I suspect I have COVID-19

If you suspect, you have COVID-19 avoid contact with other people, wear a mask and inform your supervisor/manager immediately to activate procedures for screening and testing if indicated.

The risks to workers from COVID-19 infections are minimal when **APPLYING STANDARD UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS** for prevention of infection for every case. Post-mortem activities should be conducted with a focus on avoiding aerosol generating procedures, and if aerosol generation is likely (e.g. when using an oscillating saw) that appropriate engineering controls and personal protective equipment (PPE) are used. The implementation of these precautions should prevent direct contact and inhalation of infectious material.

NOTE:

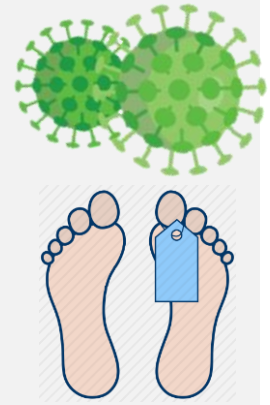
¹The type of PPE required is based on the tasks performed and current controls in place, which are informed by the risk assessment. Minimum PPE include nonsterile nitrile or low latex gloves, long-sleeved fluid-resistant or impermeable gown, plastic face shield or goggles, and face mask to protect the face, eyes, nose, and mouth from splashes.

²COVID-19 related deaths, are not medico-legal / Forensic Pathology Service deaths, so no medico-legal autopsies will be required for such deaths. Possible autopsy “risk” may be death from unnatural circumstances in a carrier of SARS-CoV-2, in that case standard precautions would be adequate.

³Moving recently deceased patients might expel small amounts of air from the lungs, presenting a minor risk, therefore transfer the body in a bag applying universal precautions.



Preparedness Plan



RISK CATEGORY	BAGGING	VIEWING IN FUNERAL PALOUR	EMBALMING	HYGIENIC PREPARATION IN FUNERAL PALOUR	DISPOSAL OF DEAD BODY
Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)	Must	Restricted	Not allowed	Allowed with PPE by palour workers	Cremation is advisable

ATTACH TO TOE

EMPLOYER SHOULD CONSIDER:

- ▶▶ Review, update and implement policies and procedures that address COVID-19 including management of high risk infections, injuries and COVID-19 positive employees
- ▶▶ Have HR policies to account for leave such as quarantine (14 days), etc.
- ▶▶ Conduct or review risk assessment to identify exposure risks for workers and implement appropriate control measures
- ▶▶ Provide training and education on prevention of COVID-19 infections; and use, storage and disposal of personal protective equipment (PPE), where relevant
- ▶▶ Ensure adequate supply and access to PPE
- ▶▶ Staff experience and facility readiness before conducting autopsies of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases
- ▶▶ Provide resources to prevent and limit the spread and transmission of COVID-19 to staff
- ▶▶ Advise relatives of the new state of disaster regulation and restrictions on rituals and funeral procedures

EMPLOYEES SHOULD:

- ▶▶ Comply with work practices and procedures
- ▶▶ Use disinfectant and dispose of relevant PPE in accordance with standard operating procedures.
- ▶▶ Wash hands with soap and water immediately after removing PPE.
- ▶▶ After completion of an examination or movement of a body, local disinfection protocols should be followed.
- ▶▶ Do not share pens/utensils with the public and maintain a social distance of 1-2 meters

General precautions to protect yourself

- **Wash hands regularly** using soap and water (~20 sec) or **sanitise** using alcohol (≥70%) based hand rub
- Avoid touching yours eyes, nose or mouth
- **Avoid travelling** if not necessary
- There are currently **no vaccines** for COVID-19, however it is advisable to **take the flu vaccine**
- If you have been in **contact** with a confirmed COVID-19 body, **quarantine** at home and monitor for signs of illness.

WORKPLACE DISINFECTION PROCEDURES

Workplaces must be kept clean and hygienic at all times. Frequently used surfaces should be wiped with 0.5% sodium hypochlorite (bleach). Due to it being corrosive metal surfaces could be wiped with 70% alcohol.

