

COVID-19: Funerals and Handling of Bodies: April 1, 2020

This information sheet has been developed to provide common guidance to all those who may participate in the removal of a decedent who is positive for COVID-19 or for those who conduct funeral services.

COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning how it spreads. The virus is thought to mainly spread from close contact (i.e., within about 6 feet) with a person who is currently sick with COVID-19. The virus likely spreads primarily through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

Funeral services

There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19. However, the following guidance should be observed:

- Funerals cannot exceed 10 people while the order is in place.
- All funerals and cremations must occur within three days of the date of death, if practical.

Handling a body

Funeral homes should be notified if the decedent they are to collect has been tested positive for COVID-19.

The act of moving a recently deceased patient may be sufficient to expel a small amount of air from the lungs, thereby presenting a risk of contamination. Those handling the body should use full PPE consisting of an impervious gown with full sleeve coverage, eye protection, N95 mask (or other approved mask) and double surgical gloves. Refer to the CDC guidance:

Preparing personnel/staff

- Appropriate PPE should be donned BEFORE contact with the body.
- No nonessential personnel should be present in the room/morgue when making a removal and ONLY those properly outfitted with appropriate PPE should be involved in the process.
- Have a deliberate plan in place and understood by all personal/staff participating in the removal of the body concerning all facets of the removal process (e.g. putting on and removing of PPE, route from morgue/room to vehicle and other vital information).

Preparing the body for removal

- Cover the face entirely (especially nose and mouth) with a material (rolled cotton, paper towels, cloth towel, etc.) thoroughly soaked with a strong disinfectant.
- Ensure the body is properly tagged with the decedent's identification.
- Ideally the body should be wiped down with disinfectant when possible.

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- The body should be placed in a lightweight body bag, often referred to as shrouds by hospitals.
- The body bag is wiped down with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims disinfectant.
- Tag the body bag with the decedent's identification.
- Hospitals should apply a biohazard or other label indicating an infectious case. Alternatively, clearly mark (with heavy black marker) with appropriate language.
- The body can then be transported to the funeral home or coroner vehicle by the most direct route possible.

Preparing funeral personnel to return to funeral home, morgue or other location

- Once the body is placed in the funeral vehicle, remove PPE.
ALTERNATIVELY: Insure the transportation cot/gurney is completely wiped down with an EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claim disinfectant, properly remove PPE and put on double gloves to handle the cot/gurney from the place of removal to vehicle.
- Place PPE in a biohazard bag or other container and transport to the funeral home for proper disposal. NOTE: Hospitals may take PPE or disposal.
- After removal of PPE, wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

Citizen deaths outside the United States

When a U.S. citizen dies outside the United States, the deceased person's next of kin or legal representative should notify U.S. consular officials at the Department of State. Consular personnel are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide assistance to U.S. citizens for overseas emergencies.

Notification

- If a family member, domestic partner or legal representative is in a different country from the deceased person, he or she should call the Department of State's Office of Overseas Citizens Services in Washington, D.C. from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday, at 888-407-4747 (toll-free) or 202-501-4444.
- For emergency assistance after working hours or on weekends and holidays, call the Department of State switchboard at 202-647-4000 and ask to speak with the Overseas Citizens Services duty officer.
- In addition, the [U.S. embassy](#) closest to or in the country where the U.S. citizen died can provide assistance.

Returning a body to the United States

- CDC does not require an autopsy before the remains of a person who died overseas are returned to the United States. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the death, some

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countries may require an autopsy. Sources of support to the family include the local consulate or embassy, travel insurance provider, tour operator, faith-based and aid organizations, and the deceased's employer. There likely will need to be an official identification of the body and official documents issued by the consular office.

- CDC requirements for importing human remains depend upon if the body has been embalmed, cremated or if the person died from a [quarantinable communicable disease](#). At this time, COVID-19 is a quarantinable communicable disease in the United States and the remains must meet the standards for importation found in 42 Code of Federal Regulations Part 71.55 and may be cleared, released and authorized for entry into the United States only under the following conditions:
 - The remains are cremated; OR
 - The remains are properly embalmed and placed in a hermetically sealed casket; OR
 - The remains are accompanied by a permit issued by the CDC Director. The CDC permit (if applicable) must accompany the human remains at all times during shipment.
 - Permits for the importation of the remains of a person known or suspected to have died from a quarantinable communicable disease may be obtained through the CDC Division of Global Migration and Quarantine by calling the CDC Emergency Operations Center at 770-488-7100 or emailing dgmqpolicyoffice@cdc.gov.

Additional resources

- <http://www.cdc.gov/importation/human-remains.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirator-use-faq.html>
- <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/pdfs/PPE-Sequence-508.pdf>
- <https://www.nfda.org/covid-19>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>