



COVID-19 Guidance on Management of the Deceased

During this unprecedented coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, funeral establishments must comply with Governor Carney's emergency declaration, as well as all guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Public Health. Funeral establishments are required to:

- Follow routine infection prevention, especially when coming into contact with a decedent with confirmed or suspected COVID-19;
- Practice use of standard precautions and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE);
- Perform routine environmental cleaning;
- Prohibit gatherings of ten (10) or more people, under the State of Emergency, until May 15, 2020 or the public health threat of COVID-19 has been eliminated (this includes the officiant and any other non-family members present during memorial services); and
- Advise funeral attendees of CDC guidance, such as encouraging those who are ill, and or at-risk (i.e. elderly and those who are immune-compromised), to stay home and following healthy habits such as social distancing, hand hygiene, covering cough and sneezes, etc.

In addition, the following guidance should be used to respectfully and compassionately care for the decedents during this distressing time.

PREVENTING CONTACT WITH INFECTIOUS BODILY FLUIDS

When handling human remains with known or suspected COVID-19 infection, use standard precautions to ensure protection from body fluids splashing or contaminating eyes, mouth, nose, hands, or clothing. At a minimum, funeral establishment workers should:

- Wear nonsterile, nitrile gloves when handling potentially infectious materials;
- Wear heavy-duty gloves over the nitrile gloves if there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds, or other injuries that break the skin;
- Wear a clean, long-sleeved fluid-resistant or impermeable gown to protect skin and clothing; and
- Use a plastic face shield or a face mask and goggles to protect the face, eyes, nose, and mouth from splashes of potentially infectious bodily fluids.

TRANSPORTATION AND RELEASE OF REMAINS

Follow standard precautions when making a transfer from any facility. If you know the deceased died of a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, wear PPE. If the location of the removal is a personal residence, you may wish to let the family know that, for your protection and theirs during this pandemic, that your staff will be wearing appropriate PPE. This will set their expectations so they are not caught unaware when you arrive. Be sure to disinfect the outside of the body bag with an EPA approved product expected to be effective against COVID-19.

ARRANGEMENT CONFERENCES

Even if COVID-19 is not the cause of death, surviving family may have been exposed and/or be contagious. Therefore, teleconferencing options are strongly encouraged, if possible. In-person arrangement conferences should implement the social distancing requirements of 6 feet between people to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

CREMATION AND BURIALS

At this time, the CDC states that decedents with COVID-19 may be direct buried or cremated according to the family's preferences.

MEMORIAL SERVICES

Funeral establishments can assist families in planning small graveside, chapel, church, and visitation services. Under the State of Emergency, gatherings over ten (10) persons are prohibited. This includes the officiant and any other non-family members present during the service. Any family member that has been exposed to COVID-19 or is showing signs of active illness, such as fever or cough, should not be admitted to the funeral home to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others.

According to the CDC, there may be less chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging after the body has been prepared for viewing. However, people should consider not touching or kissing the body of someone who has died of COVID-19.

Activities such as washing and shrouding should be avoided before, during, and after the body has been prepared, if possible. The dignity of the dead, their cultural and religious traditions, and their families should be respected and protected throughout. If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible. At a minimum, people conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional PPE may be required, such as disposable gown, face shield or goggles and facemask.

If you have questions about this guidance, please contact:

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidance on COVID-19 and Funerals

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html# covid19-funerals

World Health Organization Guidance on COVID-19

<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331538National>

Funeral Directors Association Guidance on COVID-19

www.nfda.org/covid-19

For the latest Delaware updates:
de.gov/coronavirus