COVID-19 Death Care
Hospitals, Prisons, Hospice,
Long Term Care, and Nursing Facilities

Guidance on the safer handling of decedents can reduce the risk of exposure for funeral home staff, health care staff, patients, residents and inmates. The following guidance is based on recommendations from the Ohio Funeral Directors Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Ohio Department of Health. Guidance is issued with the understanding that all mentioned resources may not be readily available (such as PPE). The State of Ohio recommends providing death care as if each decedent could be COVID-19 positive. Staff should use their best judgement to reduce the risk of exposure when providing death care.

Infection Control
Follow CDC Standard Precautions:
- Hand hygiene (washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds)
- Personal Protective Equipment
    - Minimal: mask and gloves
    - Additional: goggles/face shield and gown depending on the situation

Death Certificate
The Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Emergency Management Agency remind physicians to utilize the electronic death registration system (EDRS) to ensure death certificates are completed in a timely manner. ORC 3705.16(C) directs attending physicians to sign death certificates within forty-eight hours. Ohio physicians are advised to electronically complete and sign/certify the cause of death for Ohio records in the EDRS. CLICK HERE FOR TUTORIALS AND INFORMATION ON USING EDRS.

Preparation for Transfer
- Follow Standard Precautions, including additional personal protective equipment (PPE) if splashing of fluids is expected.
- With the exception of a death deemed to be a coroner's case, prepare the body for transfer including removal of all tubes and lines.
- If respiratory infection is the cause of death or suspected, place rolled cotton gauze or cotton balls in each nostril and oral cavity (if materials are available and staff has capacity to complete). Use a syringe to soak cotton with a nonbleached based disinfectant with emerging viral pathogens claims.

- Cover the decedent's head with a pillowcase or plastic bag to minimize aerosolized droplets before being placed in a body bag (if available).
- If body bags are not available, the decedent can be completely wrapped in a sheet and moved to the designated holding area.
- Place ID tag (if available) on the outside of the bag. Preferably tying the two zippers on the body bag together or taped to the outside of the outer most sheet wrapping the remains.

After the decedent has been bagged
- Disinfect the outside of the bag with a product with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder-to-kill viruses.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.)
- Wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling the body bag.

Transfer of Decedent

- Identify a holding room for deceased patients close to an exit from which the funeral home will remove the decedent. For hospitals, morgue pickup should be arranged. This will minimize exposures for patients, facility staff and funeral home staff.
- Advise the funeral practitioner at the time of initial death notification:
  - if respiratory infection is suspected
  - if there is not a body bag available
- If stretchers are not available to move the decedent, please refer to your facility's disaster plan on transferring "in bed" patients.
- Have any necessary documentation available at the transfer area to help the funeral practitioner avoid going into more than one area of your facility.
- Limit the amount of personnel escorting the funeral staff and decedent from the point of removal to the funeral vehicle.

Resources

- Ohio Funeral Directors Association
  - OFDAonline.org
  - 1-800-589-6332
- National Funeral Directors Association
  - nfda.org/covid-19/technical-information
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - COVID-19 and Funerals FAQs
  - Postmortem Guidance
- Ohio's Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
  - 614-799-6500

Updated: 4/20/20