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DDG (NHSL)
All Provincial Directors of Health Services
Regional Directors of Health Services
Directors of Teaching Hospitals/ Provincial General Hospitals &
District General Hospitals
Medical Superintendents of Base Hospitals

AUTOPSY PRACTICE AND DISPOSAL OF A CORPSE INFECTED WITH COVID-19

The Circular No. EPID/400/2019 n-COV dated on 01/04/2020 and 21/07/2020 titled "Autopsy Practice and Disposal of a Corpse due to COVID-19" is further amended.

This circular is to provide standard guidance on autopsy and disposal of persons died due to COVID-19 or infected with COVID-19, which is diagnosed by PCR or Rapid Antigen Test.

Based on individual request of next-of-kin/ closest relative, the remains of the deceased are allowed for cremation or burial. Cremation/ burial should be carried out within 24 hours after issuing the documents pertaining to the release of the corpse by the appointed authority. The corpse should not be handed over to relatives and should never be washed or embalmed. The corpses should be minimally handled throughout the procedure. It is advised to have the disposition at closest crematorium/ designated cemetery/ designated burial site by the Director General of Health Services (DGHS).

Unidentified or unclaimed corpse need to be disposed at the expenses of the government and the method of disposal should be cremation.

Those who handle corpses should adhere to the Standard Infection Control Precautions (SICPs) and Transmission Based Precautions (TBPs). Additional precautions should be adhered for Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGPs).

A. Instructions on method of disposal

1. If the death has occurred in a hospital/ health care center. –

- Morgue staff of the office of the Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) / similar staff member should provide body bags to the relevant unit staff (ward, ICU, OPD, etc.), where the death has occurred.
- The unit staff is responsible for preparing and placing the body in the body bag wearing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) adhering to SICPs and TBPs. If an autopsy is to be performed, the corpse should not be treated with disinfectants. It is not a requirement to keep the corpse at ICU/ ward/ place of death for two (2) hours. The body can be handed over to the relevant morgue staff immediately after proper certification of death.
- The body inside the body bag should be handed over to the morgue staff wearing PPE.
- The morgue staff should carry the corpse inside a body bag in a trolley to the morgue and place in a pre-designated area.
- The relatives must provide a coffin to the Office of the JMO/ morgue.
- In case of cremation relatives need to reserve the place, date and time at the crematorium assigned by the health authority by following relevant procedures.
- The relatives need to inform the in-charge of the morgue regarding the time and place of cremation.
- The relatives can arrange a simple religious ritual, which can be facilitated by hospital/ health care institution authority. A maximum of two religious dignitaries can be allowed for any religious activity under the supervision of the health authorities. Only five members of the family at a time is permitted to attend the religious activity and viewing the body at the hospital.
- Allow 10 minutes for any religious activities under the supervision of the health authorities at the health care institution while observing physical distancing and Standard Infection Prevention Control (SIPC) precautions.
- Viewing of the remains will be allowed while the corpse is enclosed in the body bag only at the health-care facility /mortuary for a period of not more than 10 minutes while observing physical distancing and standard IPC precautions. Subsequent viewing or touching of the corpse / belongings of the deceased shall not be permitted.
- Morgue staff wearing appropriate PPE should bring the corpse from the pre-designated area to facilitate the viewing of the remains and place in the coffin provided by the relatives.
- Disposal process should not compromise the safety of family members or the community. The body will not be handed over to the relatives.
- The corpse will be transported to the place of disposal by designated authorized mode of transportation under the supervision of health authorities and escorted by police. (Inspector General of Police need to give instructions in this regard)
- This process needs to be supervised by the area MOH/ a representative (PHI) and the area police until completion of the disposal.

- The bodies are cremated at the closest designated crematorium whereas burial must take place at a common designated cemetery/ burial site designated by the DGHS. This burial site shall be used as a common burial site for burial of any infectious death.
 - In case of cremation the relatives are permitted to obtain ashes at their requests.
 - The dignity of the deceased, their cultural and religious traditions, and their families should be respected and protected throughout.
2. If the death has occurred in a place other than health care institution –
 - Upon receiving the body at the morgue if tested positive for COVID-19, the morgue staff shall place the body inside a body bag and keep in the pre-designated area and follow the instructions given on A 1.
 3. If a death has occurred in a health care institution, of a patient who is not previously diagnosed of COVID-19 –
 - Once the body reaches the morgue if subsequently tested for COVID-19, the morgue staff shall place the body inside a body bag and keep in the pre-designated area and follow the above procedure.

B. Instructions for an Inquest/ post mortem

1. If an inquest is required the authority of health care institution must follow the normally accepted procedure.
2. If a post mortem examination is required;
 - It should be performed at a morgue with necessary basic facilities. This has to be decided by the Consultant JMO of the institution. In an instance of an unavailability of a consultant JMO, the decision has to be obtained from the Consultant JMO of the nearest institution.
 - If facilities are not available, the body shall be transported to a morgue with necessary facilities with the concurrence of relevant Consultant JMO and Head of health care institution receiving the body.
 - Upon completion of the post mortem examination the body is placed inside a body bag and kept in the pre-designated area and follow the above procedure (The body is disposed as per the instructions given by the magistrate/ inquirer-into-sudden death).

C. Instructions for Burial

1. Burial preferably will be performed in an island by adhering to adequate requirements.
2. As a mandate of the District Environmental Committee, under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary, District Secretary (GA) and coordination of the Provincial Director of Health Services (PDHS), Regional Director of Health Services (RDHS), other relevant officials and Ministry of Health nominee of the DGHS to identify a suitable location for burial of COVID-19 infected corpses. The location should be notified to the DGHS and approval obtained.
 - Corpses should be buried 1.5 to 3.0 meter deep.

- **Minimum distances to water sources.**

Number of bodies	Distance from water source
4 or less	200 m
5 to 60	250 m
60 or more	350 m
120 bodies per 100m ²	350 m
Note: The bottom of grave should be at least 2.0 m above the groundwater table	

In the event of conflict between any applicable legislation and this guidance, the applicable legislation shall prevail.

N.B. This will be reviewed with evolving science in the future as it is deemed necessary



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Copies -:

1. Hon. Minister of Health
2. Hon. State Minister of Primary Health Care, Epidemics and COVID Disease Control
3. Hon. State Minister of Production, Supply and Regulation of Pharmaceutical
4. Secretary, Ministry of Public Services, Provincial Councils and Local Government- inform relevant Chief Secretaries and District Secretaries
5. Secretary, Ministry of Defence
6. Secretary, Ministry of Health
7. State Secretary, Ministry of Primary Health Care, Epidemics and COVID Disease Control
8. State Secretary, Ministry of Production, Supply and Regulation of Pharmaceutical
9. Head of National Operations Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak (NOPCO)
10. Additional Secretary (Medical Services)
11. Inspector General of Police
12. All DDGs
13. Director, Quarantine
14. CMOH,CMC
15. Chief Epidemiologist
16. President ,College of Forensic Pathologists
17. Chief JMO, Colombo
18. Director, Medical Technological Services and Ministry Coordinator/ in charge COVID-19 operations - to coordinate