

Unattended Death investigation guidelines outside a Healthcare facility

Prevention of Exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (COVID19)/Personal Protective Equipment for Scene Response

- The CDC has issued guidance for handling decedents with potential COVID-19 infections for medical examiners, coroners, pathologists, other workers involved in the postmortem care of decedents with potential COVID-19 infections, and local and state health departments. It can be found here²: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html>.
- Precautions utilized at all scenes:
 - Use social distancing (at least 6 feet apart) for everyone on scene including law enforcement, funeral homes, family
 - If unable to use social distancing due to space, wear N95 or surgical mask, goggle or face shield and gloves
 - If anyone on scene is symptomatic, wear N95 or surgical mask, goggles or face shield, gloves, plastic apron or Tyvek
 - Separate symptomatic people from body and any responders; law enforcement, EMS, funeral directors, AME's
 - Limit number of personnel that enter the area. Only essential personnel should enter.
 - Increase ventilation to the area by opening doors and windows.
 - Face masks are very limited right now. Symptomatic people can be asked to cover their mouth or face with a scarf or other object to help reduce the spread of droplets.
 - Bodies can be placed in medium or heavy-duty bag. Use wipes provided by OCME to wipe down bag before transport.
 - Get in and out. Do not stand inside waiting for the funeral home to come pick up body.
 - Only take what you need into the scene to complete your investigation
 - Wash down all equipment, pens, etc. with wipes after the investigation is complete
- When responding to a scene, detectives should use everyday preventive actions (e.g. hand washing, avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands, and use of social distancing techniques to minimize close contact) and make early inquiries about signs/symptoms of an infectious respiratory illness in the decedent and household members present during investigation by asking the following questions:
 - Travel in the last two weeks
 - Contact with persons with known COVID-19
 - Recent signs, symptoms and diagnoses (including recent laboratory testing if any) for infectious respiratory disease in the decedent and their immediate close contacts.

- Symptoms compatible with COVID-19 may include measured fever, chills, cough or difficulty breathing.
 - Triage of decedent's with such "flu-like" symptoms at the time of death, that die outside a health care facility, is detailed below.
 - If initial investigation raises concern for an infectious respiratory illness among *living* persons you are in close contact with during the investigation, use of an N95 mask (an expired mask may be used if unexpired stock is not available) is recommended. Otherwise, Standard Precautions are appropriate.
- Standard Precautions to prevent exposure to infectious material/bodily fluids should be a routine part of a detectives on scene investigation activities for all deaths and are essential in cases in which infectious agents are suspected (See Personal Protective Equipment Guidelines below and CDC recommendations for Standard Precautions at <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/infectioncontrol/summary-infection-prevention-practices/standard-precautions.html>).
 - Most often, spread of Coronavirus between living persons happens with close contact (i.e., within about 6 feet) via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, like the spread of influenza. Such airborne transmission is not a concern when handling deceased human remains, unless surviving family members/close contacts of decedent present during scene investigation are also infected with SARS-CoV-2 or have symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Postmortem handling of remains should be conducted using **standard contact and droplet precautions**, focusing on preventing direct contact with infectious material/fluids, percutaneous injury, and the hazards of moving heavy remains.
 - Funeral Directors are responsible for packaging remains for transport and are required for body removal and transportation to final disposition. Assistant medical examiners may assist the funeral director with packaging the remains. Law enforcement and other first responders (i.e. Firemen) should not be asked to assist with packaging of remains but may assist with moving bagged bodies. In tight or difficult locations and with obese decedents, the team approach is necessary and appreciated.
 - Deceased persons should be secured in sealed body bags, which are clearly identified with the deceased demographic information (full name, date of birth and date and place of death). Ideally bodies should be in heavy-duty "trauma bags" which have handles to facilitate body movement. Minimally, medium-duty bags can be used.
 - If other symptomatic individuals within the home, apartment or general area within the facility of the deceased need to be interviewed it is recommended that an "in-person" interview **NOT** be conducted. It is recommended that detectives obtain a phone number for any symptomatic individuals and then conduct interviews via phone or by

other electronic means. If an “in-person” interview with a symptomatic individual is required then the use of **disposable nitrile gloves**, a long-sleeved **fluid-resistant or impermeable gown**, and a **plastic face shield or face mask with goggles** to protect exposed skin, eyes, nose, and mouth from contact or splashes of potentially infectious bodily fluids is recommended.

- After PPE has been removed, wash hands immediately with soap and water for 20 seconds. If hands are not visibly dirty and soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%-95% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water before using alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching the face with gloved or unwashed hands. With the shortage of N95's we are recommending they are to be reused if not soiled (Follow the CDC guidance on this).