



COVID-19

Dead Body Management

Standard Operating Procedure

JIPMER



Prepared by

Dept. of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, JIPMER

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Medical provisions

1. Transmission of COVID-19 is through droplets. There is unlikely to have an increased risk of COVID infection from a dead body to health workers or family members who follow standard precautions while handling body.
2. However, till now there is no such acceptable scientific data that COVID 19 cannot spread through dead bodies, except the lungs. The dead bodies are considered to be a source of infection in a number of infectious diseases.
3. There is always a possibility of a medicolegal case harboring covid-19 and thus the virus may unknowingly get transmitted to health workers during handling or to other bodies if stored in the same cold chamber unit.

Standard Precautions to be followed by Health Care Workers while handling dead bodies of COVID

1. Hand hygiene.
2. Use of personal protective equipment (e.g., water resistant apron, gloves, N95 masks, eyewear, face shield).
3. Safe handling of sharps.
4. Disinfect bag housing dead body; instruments and devices used on the patient.
5. Disinfect linen. Clean and disinfect environmental surfaces.

All staff identified to handle dead bodies in the isolation area, mortuary, ambulance and those workers in the crematorium / burial ground should be trained in the infection prevention control practices.

Removal of the body from the isolation room or area

- The health worker attending to the dead body should perform hand hygiene, ensure proper use of PPE (water resistant apron, goggles, N95 mask, gloves).
- All tubes, drains and catheters on the dead body should be removed.
- Any puncture holes or wounds (resulting from removal of catheter, drains, tubes, or otherwise) should be disinfected with 1% hypochlorite and dressed with impermeable material.
- Apply caution while handling sharps such as intravenous catheters and other sharp devices. They should be disposed into a sharps container.

- Plug oral, nasal orifices of the dead body to prevent leakage of body fluids.
- If the family of the patient wishes to view the body at the time of removal from the isolation room or area, they may be allowed to do so with the application of Standard Precautions (hand hygiene, mask and gloves)
- The dead body can be wrapped with a double layer cloth sheet soaked with disinfectant and packed into a double layer sealed leak proof sheet soaked with chlorine containing disinfectant. Then put the body in leak proof transparent plastic body bag of not less than 150 µm thick and which should be zip closed from head to toe. The exterior of the body bag can be decontaminated with 1% hypochlorite.
- Avoid unnecessary movement and handling of the dead body by transferring from the ward to any other places.
- Wherever feasible and in confirmed cases of covid-19, the body can be directly transferred from the isolation ward to the crematorium by specified vehicles and persons, thus ensuring minimum movement and handling.
- In the event of undue delay in transferring the body for last rites, body can be transferred to a dead body cold chamber unit by the same team who were involved in body packing.
- A properly functioning cold chamber unit should be identified for this purpose specifically, where the necessity to regularly handle the cold chamber does not arise by health workers involved in other routine activities.
- Keeping in view an increase in the number of such cases, a temporary morgue with proper cooling facilities (minimum possible temperature) and not necessarily a cold chamber unit can be identified where the body can be kept for a shorter duration before being transferred for last rites.
- All used/ soiled linen should be handled with standard precautions, put in bio-hazard bag and the outer surface of the bag disinfected with hypochlorite solution.
- Used equipment should be autoclaved or decontaminated with disinfectant solutions.
- All medical waste must be handled and disposed of in accordance with Bio-medical waste management rules.
- The health staff who handled the body will remove personal protective equipment, discard in appropriate waste bins and will perform hand hygiene.

Environmental cleaning and disinfection

- All surfaces of the isolation area (floors, bed, railings, side tables, IV stand, etc.) should be wiped with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite solution; allow a contact time of 30 minutes, and then allowed to air dry.

Handling of dead body in Mortuary

- Standard precautions have to be followed
- Dead bodies should be stored in cold chambers maintained at approximately 4°C.
- Environmental surfaces, instruments and transport trolleys should be properly disinfected with 1% Hypochlorite solution.
- After removing the body, the chamber door, handles and floor should be cleaned with sodium hypochlorite 1% solution.

Embalming

- Embalming of dead body should NOT be allowed.

Autopsies on COVID-19 dead bodies

- **Autopsies should be avoided.**
- But if autopsy is to be performed for special reasons, the following infection prevention control practices should be adopted:
 - The Team should be well trained in infection prevention control practices.
 - The number of forensic experts and support staff in the autopsy room should be limited.
 - The Team should use full complement of PPE (coveralls, head cover, shoe cover, N 95 mask, goggles / face shield, knee-high boots).
 - Round ended scissors should be used
 - PM40 or any other heavy duty blades with blunted points to be used to reduce prick injuries
 - Only one body cavity at a time should be dissected
 - Unfixed organs must be held firm on the table and sliced with a sponge – care should be taken to protect the hand
 - Needles should not be re-sheathed after fluid sampling – needles and syringes should be placed in a sharps bucket.

- Reduce aerosol generation during autopsy using appropriate techniques especially while handling lung tissue.
- After the procedure, body should be disinfected with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite and placed in a body bag.
- The exterior of the bag will again be decontaminated with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite solution.
- The body thereafter can be handed over to the relatives.
- Remove PPE before leaving the autopsy room and follow appropriate disposal requirements. After removing PPE, always perform good hand hygiene practices.
- Autopsy table to be disinfected as per standard protocol.

Transportation

- The personnel handling the body may follow standard precautions (surgical mask, gloves).
- The vehicle, after the transfer of the body to cremation/ burial staff, will be decontaminated with 1% Sodium hypochlorite.

At the crematorium/ Burial Ground

- The staff will practice standard precautions of hand hygiene, use of masks and gloves.
- Bathing, kissing, hugging, etc. of the dead body should not be allowed.
- The ash does not pose any risk and can be collected to perform the last rites.
- Large gathering at the crematorium/ burial ground should be avoided as a social distancing measure as it is possible that close family contacts may be symptomatic and/ or shedding the virus.

