



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

22 March 2020

DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

No. 2020 - 0158

TO: ALL UNDERSECRETARIES AND ASSISTANT SECRETARIES; DIRECTORS OF BUREAUS AND CENTERS FOR HEALTH DEVELOPMENT; MINISTER OF HEALTH – BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO; EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF SPECIALTY HOSPITALS AND NATIONAL NUTRITION COUNCIL; CHIEFS OF MEDICAL CENTERS, HOSPITALS, SANITARIA AND INSTITUTES; PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINE HEALTH INSURANCE CORPORATION; DIRECTORS OF PHILIPPINE NATIONAL AIDS COUNCIL AND TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION CENTERS AND ALL OTHERS CONCERNED

SUBJECT: Proper Handling of the Remains of Suspect, Probable, and Confirmed COVID-19 Cases

I. BACKGROUND

With an increasing number of COVID-19 cases spreading to various territories and confirmed human-to-human transmission, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) last January 30, 2020.

This Department Memorandum is being issued to reiterate the proper handling of the remains of confirmed COVID-19 cases issued under Department Memorandum 2020-0067 dated 03 February 2020 on the *Guidelines on the Disposal and Shipment of the Remains of Confirmed Cases of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Acute Respiratory Disease (2019-nCoV ARD)* and to provide guidance on the proper handling of remains of suspect, probable, and confirmed COVID-19 cases.

II. GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Suspect and probable COVID-19 patients who died with pending test results shall be handled similar to a confirmed COVID-19 case.
2. Some infectious agents may be transmitted when persons are in contact with blood, body fluids, or tissues from remains of persons with infectious diseases. Hence, standard safety precautions must be observed at all times.
3. Burial and cremation of the remains of suspect, probable, and confirmed COVID-19 patients are safe for as long as strict infection and prevention control measures are observed.
4. Wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, masks, apron/gown, and goggles shall be observed at all times.

5. Avoid sharp injury in the course of handling the dead body and in dealing with waste disposal and decontamination.
6. Remove PPE after handling the dead body and the cadaver bag, and wash hands with soap and water immediately.
7. **Always apply the principles of cultural sensitivity.**
8. Funeral service staff and personnel are granted exemptions from the imposed enhanced community quarantine. They may freely move and travel to ensure that the remains of deceased individuals will be given proper funeral service.
9. Embalming of the human remains shall not be allowed.
10. Wakes or any form of public assemblies shall not be allowed.

III. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

A. Removal of the Body of Suspect, Probable, and Confirmed COVID-19 Cases from Isolation Room or Area in a Healthcare Facility

1. All healthcare personnel, support staff, and funeral parlor workers, among others, shall wear appropriate PPE before handling the human remains.
2. All tubes, drains, and catheters shall be removed with extreme caution and disposed of properly.
3. Implants (e.g. pacemaker, orthopedic implants) in the cadaver shall not be removed to minimize exposure of personnel handling the body. In this case, the body shall be buried instead of cremated.
4. Wound drainage and needle puncture holes shall be disinfected and dressed with impermeable material.
5. Wrap the body with cloth and place it in the airtight cadaver bag that is leak-proof and zip or close tightly with tapes and bandage strips. For patients with Islamic faith, double cadaver bag with thickness of not less than 150 μm shall be used.
6. Decontaminate surface of the bag with hypochlorite solution (50-100 ppm) or one-in-four diluted household bleach (mixing 1 part of 5.25% bleach with 4 parts of water).
7. If the family of the patient wishes to view the body after removal from the isolation room or area, they may be allowed for as long as standard precautions are strictly followed.
8. Ensure that the body is fully sealed in an impermeable airtight cadaver bag before being removed from the isolation room or area and before transfer to mortuary or crematorium, to avoid leakage of body fluid.
9. Properly dispose the PPE used and wash hands with liquid soap and water immediately.

B. Removal of Body of Suspect, Probable, and Confirmed COVID-19 Cases who were Quarantined in a Non-Healthcare Facility

1. The relative of the deceased shall coordinate with the local government for the proper disposal of the remains of suspect, probable, and confirmed COVID-19 cases who are quarantined in a non-healthcare facility (e.g. home).
2. Only authorized personnel (e.g. health personnel and support staff, LGU team for management of the dead and missing persons, funeral parlor workers) shall be

allowed to handle the human remains of suspect, probable, and confirmed COVID-19 case.

3. All must wear appropriate PPE before handling the human remains.
4. All attached apparatuses, if any, such as tubes, drains, catheters on the human remains, should be removed with extreme caution and placed in a leak-proof plastic bag and closed tightly with tapes and bandage strips and properly labeled.
5. Oral nasal and rectal orifices of the human remains have to be plugged to prevent leakage of body fluids.
6. The body should be wrapped with cloth, or robust and leak-proof transparent plastic bag, and placed in the airtight cadaver bag that is leak-proof and shall be zipped or closed tightly with tapes and bandage strips and properly labeled.
7. The outside or surface of the cadaver bag should be decontaminated with hypochlorite solution (50-100 ppm) or one-in-four diluted household bleach (mixing 1 part of 5.25% bleach with 4 parts of water) and allow to air dry.
8. Ensure that the human remains are fully sealed in an impermeable airtight cadaver bag before being removed from the room or area and before transfer to the mortuary, to avoid leakage of body fluids.
9. When properly packed, the body can be safely removed from storage in the mortuary and transported to the crematorium, or placed in a coffin for burial.
10. At no instance shall unzipping the cadaver bag of the body and removal of the body be permitted.
11. The accredited/identified funeral establishment shall provide transport. If not available, the LGU shall provide transportation to the burial site/crematorium.
12. The household shall be advised to clean and disinfect the room occupied by the deceased immediately after the body was removed.
13. All soiled linens and fabrics by the deceased shall be properly washed and disinfected.

C. Transfer to Funeral Home/Crematorium

1. The accredited/identified funeral establishment/crematorium shall provide proper transport. Otherwise, the concerned Local Government Unit (LGU) shall assist in securing the services of a funeral establishment which will transport the remains to the burial site/crematorium.
2. The body shall be fully sealed in a cadaver bag and decontaminated as not to pose additional risk to the staff transporting the dead body.
3. At no instance shall unzipping the cadaver bag of the body and removal of the body be permitted.
4. Embalming and hygienic preparation, such as cleaning of the body, tidying of hair, trimming of nails and shaving shall not be allowed.
5. The personnel handling the body shall wear at the minimum a mask, gloves, water-resistant gown/apron, and goggles as protection if there be splashes.
6. The vehicle used for transport shall be disinfected immediately following proper disinfection protocol.
7. Dispose properly the PPE used and wash hands with liquid soap and water immediately.

D. Procedures for Burial and Cremation

1. The procedures for burial and cremation shall be done within 12 hours after death. However, burial of remains should be in accordance with the person's religion and culturally-acceptable norms, to the most possible extent (e.g. in Islamic rites, cremation is forbidden or "haram").
2. The staff should practice hand hygiene, use of masks, gloves, goggles and water-resistant gown/apron as standard precautions.
3. Transportation shall be provided by the funeral home to the burial site.
4. Large gathering at the crematorium/ burial ground should be avoided.
5. For those that will be buried:
 - a. Only adult members of the family of the deceased may be permitted to attend the funeral;
 - b. Remains shall be placed in a durable, airtight and sealed metal casket. For patients with Islamic faith, as stated above, remains shall alternatively be placed in double cadaver bag with thickness of not less than 150 μm .
 - c. Remains shall not be taken to any place of public assembly and viewing of the deceased shall not be permitted.
6. For those that will be cremated:
 - a. Cremains shall be reduced to the size of fine sand or ashes and packed in a cremains container before they are turned over to the relatives of the deceased; and
 - b. Cremains shall be placed in a container with a minimum capacity of 0.0049 cubic meter and made of polyethylene provided with a liner bag (preformed 5 ml plastic), locking tie and identification label.

IV. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Pursuant to Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Disease Resolution No. 15 s.2020, the following shall be the responsibilities of stakeholders:

A. Local Government Units

1. Designate funeral service facilities to handle the remains of suspect, probable, and confirmed COVID-19 cases;
2. Provide possible financial assistance to cover logistics, fuel, salary and other expenses that will be incurred in the process;
3. Together with DILG, monitor and penalize funeral homes that refuse to provide logistics and transport of COVID-19 remains, including but not limited to, refusal to pick-up the remains, subject to the policies and guidelines of the aforementioned LGUs or DILG; and
4. Release any issuances or ordinances to put a price cap or impose a price freeze on funeral services located within their jurisdiction, as deemed necessary.

B. Department of Social Welfare and Development

1. Allocate amounts for a funeral support fund to indigent suspect, probable, and confirmed COVID-19 cases regardless of whether they underwent home quarantine or were admitted to a public or private facility. DSWD shall allot PhP 25,000 per deceased for this purpose.

C. Funeral Companies

1. Provide transportation and/or housing accommodations for funeral service staff.

For strict compliance.



FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, MD, MSc
Secretary of Health