



**OFFICE OF THE CORONER
COUNTY OF CHESTER**
Coroner: Christina VandePol, M.D.

“Committed Service and
Responsiveness”

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For Immediate Release

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Photo Caption: Chester County Coroner Office Autopsy Technician prepares COVID-19 test

Photo Credit: Vince Feola

The Chester County Coroner’s Office (CCCO) is releasing information on COVID-19 deaths reported to this office. The first reported COVID-19 death in Chester County was on March 28, 2020. As of 5 pm on April 16, 2020, 52 deaths were confirmed with 32 reported in just the past week (April 10 through April 16). An additional 5 presumed COVID-19 deaths were reported, with testing either pending or not done.

By state law, “a death known or suspected to be due to contagious disease and constituting a public hazard” is reportable to the coroner of the county in which the death occurs. This applies to hospitals, long term care facilities, medical practitioners, and even funeral homes. Coroners receive death reports real time, before death certificates are registered, so the number of deaths we report will always be higher than those reported by public health departments. At the national level, the delay is even longer: the Center for Disease Control and Prevention notes that their mortality data will usually lag 1-2 weeks behind that of state vital statistics offices.

All COVID-19 deaths to date have been due to effects on the lung, primarily pneumonia. The age range for the 52 persons who have died of COVID-19 in Chester County is 57 to 98 years, with 71% being 75 years or older. Twenty women and 32 men have died. Two decedents were of South-east Asian descent, 6 were African-American, and 44 were white. Most died in a hospital setting, but 14 passed away in a long term care facility, and 3 in a private residence. Among the 52 decedents were 13 residents of other counties who died in a Chester County hospital. The duration of symptoms or illness prior to death ranged from 2 days to approximately 3 weeks. Underlying medical conditions were present in all decedents, with the most common being hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease.

Coroner Christina VandePol, M.D., stated “This has been a terrible and tragic week. It is unbelievably sad to lose so many of our elders so fast. The grief and trauma of those who have lost a spouse, a parent, or a grandparent to this virus is so much worse because COVID-19 strikes so fast and because they are often unable to say goodbye.”

“I have been inspired by the strength and sacrifices of so many in our community. That is how we are getting through this one day at a time. One example is our funeral homes who are providing refrigerated storage space for the Coroner’s Office when we need it. They have stepped up to provide our community with a very valuable service even while they are supporting so many families in a time of great grief.”

With regard to COVID-19 data reporting, Dr. VandePol said “I don’t think we ever know how many people were infected or even the true number of deaths due to this virus because of the lack of testing available here and elsewhere. That’s due to a massive systemic failure beyond the local level, in my opinion. Some coroners and medical examiners are starting to make their own test kits and perhaps we’ll be doing the same soon. We’ve been fortunate so far to receive some from hospitals, some from the State Bureau of Laboratories, and some from our County Health Department, but there’s never enough to go around. Why is that?”

The Chester County Coroner’s Office is an independent agency serving the citizens and honoring the deceased of the county by investigating the facts and circumstances concerning jurisdictional deaths which have occurred within Chester County. We determine the cause and manner of death, the identity of the decedent, and provide notification to the legal next of kin, while exhibiting the highest degree of compassion, professionalism, and integrity.