

Memo to Chester County Physicians, Hospitals, Long-Term Care Facilities, and Hospices
November 13, 2020

As we head into winter with a resurgence of COVID-19, our office would like to remind everyone of how to report COVID-19-related deaths to the Coroner's Office and the recommended post mortem care and disposition procedures for COVID-positive decedents.

REPORTING

- Per state law (16 P.S. § 1218-B), "a death known or suspected to be due to contagious disease and constituting a public hazard" falls under the jurisdiction of the Coroner and we therefore request that you notify us of such deaths.
- Report COVID-19 and any other Coroner case to the following dispatch number: (610)-383-7000. An investigator will contact the reporting party and collect necessary information.
- In almost all COVID-19-related deaths, we immediately release the body to the funeral home of the family's choice.
- We will request medical records – which must include SARS-CoV-2 test results –for all cases where we do not have access to the electronic medical record.

DEATH CERTIFICATION

- As for other natural manner deaths, the medical professional who attended the decedent during the final illness (M.D., D.O, CRNP, or P.A.) should certify the cause and manner of death for COVID-19-related deaths. The medical professional can also choose to refer the case to our office for certification.
- The reporting party will be asked about the cause of death wording for our records. We prefer a copy of the medical worksheet, but otherwise may obtain the cause of death information from the funeral home or PA DOH records.
- Where the certifying medical professional does not believe the underlying cause of death to be COVID-19 but the decedent tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, we recommend listing "SARS-CoV-2 Infection" as a contributing condition. This allows the death certificate to be accurately reconciled with tests reported to the PA Department of Health (DOH).
- The PA DOH requires all death certification for deaths attributed to COVID-19 to be done electronically using the PA Electronic Death Reporting System (EDRS). The Coroner's Office uses EDRS for all death certifications.

POST-MORTEM CARE AND DISPOSITION

- COVID-19 natural deaths will not be transported to the County morgue unless the decedent is unclaimed, the manner of death was other than natural, or the facility runs out of morgue space.

- If a decedent is suspected to have had COVID-19, but has not been tested, we require a post-mortem nasopharyngeal swab to be performed. If necessary, we can assist with that process.
- We do not perform autopsies on SARS-CoV-2-positive decedents except where the manner of death is homicide or at the discretion of the Coroner based on circumstances of the death.
- Double bagging is no longer recommended by CDC unless there is concern that a single bag may fail due to weight of the decedent, body fluids in the bag, sharp objects (jewelry), etc. Wipe down the outside of the bag with a disinfectant approved for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- The funeral home should be advised of any infectious diseases diagnoses of the decedent when they are contacted to pick up the body. Direct transfer of the body without intermediate storage is recommended to minimize exposure.

Thank you for all you do. The Coroner's Office stands ready to assist you as we all work to get through this pandemic as safely and compassionately as possible.

Feel free to contact our office 24/7 for any questions or concerns about COVID-19 or other deaths.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christina VandePol, M.D.", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Christina VandePol, M.D.