



**OFFICE OF THE CORONER
COUNTY OF CHESTER**
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“Committed Service and
Responsiveness”

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Photo Caption: Chester County Coroner Office Transporter T.J. Greene disinfects a vehicle between transports.

Photo Credit: Chester County Coroner Office

The Chester County Coroner Office is reporting a second surge in COVID-19 deaths in Chester County. After a slowdown in infections and deaths during the summer months, 136 COVID-19 related deaths have been reported since October 1, with 82 in the first 3 weeks of December. The total number of SARS-CoV-2 virus-related fatalities so far this year is now 524. This is likely an undercount since some COVID-19 deaths are not being reported as required.

In the first surge, April through June 2020, 347 persons here lost their lives to the pandemic. The majority of deaths during that period were in residents of long term care facilities. The elderly, those 75 or older, are still the most vulnerable, but only about 46% of deaths during this second surge have been in residents of nursing homes or other institutional settings. Instead, household and community-acquired SARS-CoV-2 infections, documented in decedents as young as 2 years of age, are fueling the current surge.

"Whenever we respond to a home death now, we have to assume COVID-19 could be a factor," said Chester County Coroner Christina VandePol. "We often do a post-mortem SARS-CoV-2 test, especially with unattended home deaths. We've documented infection in several sudden, unexpected deaths, including in younger people. Then we have to determine the role of the infection in the death, by review of medical records, an autopsy, or other tests. The previously reported COVID-19 home death of a 19-year-old student, for example, was confirmed at our request by a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) pathology lab."

Little is known about transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus after death, so Chester County staff as well as first responders and funeral home workers have to remain vigilant. Chester County Coroner Office employees are essential workers and must remain on duty 24/7. Social distancing is not an option during most scene responses, so full PPE, including better technology such as half-face respirators, is required. Quarantine is not used except in case of symptoms or positive testing due to the need to maintain staffing. To date, two Coroner Office employees have fallen ill with COVID-19, but neither was infected at work.

"The tragic loss of so many in our community is devastating. Our hearts go out to the thousands of people who are going through the holidays missing family members and friends they've lost in the pandemic." said Coroner Christina VandePol. "Sadly, I expect it to get worse before it gets better. What we're seeing now is uncontrolled spread of the virus. It's everywhere. The vaccines are our best hope for a better 2021. But I expect it may be 2022 before we all put away our masks."

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.