



March 30, 2020

Below is information gathered from available government and state and local authorities, correspondence from death care industry organizations, and discussion with healthcare professionals.

The information in this document can facilitate risk assessment and the establishment of best practices to protect workers and families at the cemetery. Please adhere to all national, state, and local restrictions on public gatherings and social distancing. In addition, discuss with the funeral home their practices for handling remains at their facility.

1. General CDC Information on COVID-19

- CDC is still learning how the virus spreads. It is important to continue to monitor CDC information.
- **“There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19.”**
- COVID-19 is **primarily** spread via close contact (within 6 feet) with an infected person **via cough or sneeze landing in the nose or mouth of nearby person or inhaled into lungs.**
- It is also possible to contract COVID-19 via a surface or object with the virus on it and then **touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly eyes.**

2. CDC Guidelines for Death Care Workers in Direct Contact With COVID-19 Positive Remains

The following guidelines are from the CDC, **specifically for death care workers including coroners, medical examiners, autopsy technicians, funeral directors, and other mortuary workers.** The CDC recommends the use of:

- Disposable gloves
- Tyvek or impermeable gown
- Plastic face shield or surgical mask and goggles
- Respiratory protection if aerosol generation is a risk
- If using a body bag, disinfect the exterior of the body bag before any movement



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Funeral homes are advised to follow CDC, state, and local guidelines for handling human remains of individuals who have died of certain infectious diseases.

3. Practical PPE Measures to Consider

It is up to the cemetery management to review all CDC, OSHA, and state and local guidelines to determine their protocol. While the CDC recommendations for PPE are specific to individuals handling potentially infectious human remains, cemetery workers may not be at the same level of risk because the remains will likely be contained inside of a disinfected body bag inside a casket. Cemeteries conducting burials and entombments during this crisis may want to consider the following practices:

- Attendance sheet of all people present, kept for 30 days
- Cemeteries should strictly enforce social distancing during the funeral service
- Employees interacting with the casket should wear disposable gloves, Tyvek suits, and face coverings
- Disinfect casket when it arrives from the hearse
- Proper disposal of Tyvek suits that have touched a casket*
- Proper disposal of all disposable gloves
- If any PPE becomes grossly soiled, whatever process taking place should be paused and the PPE replaced before completing the task
- Perform routine and regular proper hand hygiene before and after an entombment/interment, and throughout the day

**Proper disposal means careful removal and placement in plastic trash bag*

4. On Disinfecting

Cemetery workers should designate one or two employees, wearing PPE, to disinfect the exterior of the casket, prioritizing the handles and sides that can come in contact with employees after the casket is removed from the hearse. Cemeteries should check the EPA database for disinfectants proven effective against COVID-19 here <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2> and wait the amount of time indicated on the product directions. The amount of time that a product takes to disinfect an area varies. Please refer to the product label for the disinfectant you are using.



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Conclusions

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted via coughs and sneezes of individuals within a distance of six feet. It may linger in the air between living people longer than initially thought. It can also be transmitted via surfaces -- an individual could contract the virus by touching an infected surface and then touching their nose, mouth, or possibly eyes.

Our understanding on COVID-19 transmission is continually evolving. We continue to read and discuss with our healthcare professional advisors.

PPE will create additional barriers between employees and the virus, but, more importantly, it will positively influence the behavior of cemetery workers. Gloves, and/or any kind of face covering will discourage touching one's own face. A protective suit will create an additional barrier. Consistent and proper hand hygiene is critical.

Resources:

WHO: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331538/WHO-COVID-19-IPC_DBMgmt-2020.1-eng.pdf

New York State Division of Cemeteries

<https://www.dos.ny.gov/cnsl/Memo%20re%20COVID-19%2020.03.10.pdf>

NFDA: <https://www.nfda.org/covid-19>

OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html>

CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#anchor_1584390222777