

COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Handling of Deceased Persons

This document provides advice and recommendations for the handling of deceased persons to funeral services professionals, non-professionals handling deceased persons, and operators of non-AHS and AHS care facilities. Site-specific policies may also apply. The document includes information on the following topics:

1. COVID-19 classification under the Bodies of Deceased Persons Regulation of the Public Health Act of Alberta.
2. Routine practices including personal protective equipment (PPE).
3. COVID-19 labelling requirements.
4. Testing for COVID-19 in decedents.
5. Procedures for handling belongings of a decedent that is a probable /confirmed COVID-19 case.
6. Guidelines for Funeral Services.
7. Handling of deceased persons by non-licensed individuals.
8. Definitions

For general information on COVID-19 please visit: <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>.

1. COVID-19 classification under the Bodies of Deceased Persons Regulation of the Public Health Act of Alberta.

Schedule 3 of the Bodies of Deceased Persons Regulation describes the required practices for handling of all deceased bodies, including those infected with COVID-19. COVID-19 is not considered a Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 communicable disease under the Bodies of Deceased Persons Regulation.

2. Routine practices including selection of PPE.

Schedule 3 describes routine practices to be followed, including hand hygiene, selection and use of PPE, cleaning and disinfection, and containment of decedents.

Decedents infected with COVID-19 are to be placed in an impervious body bag as soon as practically possible after death. This generally means hospital or care facility staff are responsible for containing the body. With a death in the community, this may mean a funeral services professional is responsible. Double bagging is not required. At this time, there are no restrictions on transportation, embalming, or disposition services provided by funeral homes, crematoriums, or cemeteries in Alberta. If embalming is conducted, production of splash or aerosols should be minimized when possible, and appropriate PPE must be worn.

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The following guidance applies to the handling of deceased persons in AHS and non-AHS facilities.

Routine practices include:

- Hand hygiene performed at the appropriate times (e.g. before and after touching the decedent).
- Selection and use of suitable disinfectant products (disinfectants with a DIN and a virucidal claim) on all surfaces.
- Selection and use of appropriate PPE, including for contact and droplet precautions.

Table 1. PPE for handling decedents during COVID-19.*

PPE	Minimal Contact Procedures (E.g. public viewing involving touching of body, transporting in body bag)	High Contact Procedures (E.g. significant manual handling, undressing, preparation, moving without body bag)	Invasive Procedures (E.g. autopsy, embalming)
Disposable gloves (and hand hygiene)	√	√	√
Disposable plastic apron		√	√
Gown (disposable or launderable)		√	√
Fluid-resistant surgical mask		√	Non-aerosol generating procedures
N-95 respirator or equivalent			Aerosol generating procedures
Eye protection (e.g. goggles, face shield)		√	√

*Adapted from:

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Government of Alberta. (2020, March 30).

Information for funeral homes: COVID-19. <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/a17a832e/files/uploaded/OCME-bulletin-funeral-homes%20%282020-03-30%29.pdf>

World Health Organization. (2020, March 24). Infection Prevention and Control for the safe management of a dead body in the context of COVID-19. Retrieved from

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331538/WHO-COVID-19-IPC_DBMgmt-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

PPE supplies are provided via existing supply chain processes and site specific distribution within AHS sites.

Non-AHS facilities who are unable to procure PPE through their usual suppliers may request PPE through the government of Alberta's online form at:

<https://ppe.sp.alberta.ca/Lists/Requests/New.aspx?IsDlg=1>.

3. COVID-19 labelling requirements.

There is no special labeling requirement for COVID-19 under the Bodies of Deceased Persons Regulation as COVID-19 is not defined as a Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 Communicable Disease under the Regulation.

4. Testing for COVID-19 in decedents.

A swab for COVID-19 should be taken in circumstances where COVID-19 infection is suspected, especially if advice to close contacts may be needed. Swabs should be taken as early as possible but within 48 hours post mortem.

5. Procedures for handling belongings and cleaning spaces after a probable/confirmed COVID-19 case death.

The personal belongings of a deceased person with probable/confirmed COVID-19 do not require disposal. However, disposal of some non-valuables may be considered with familial/caregiver consent.

Ideally, care facility staff should gather the decedent's belongings from the room and then clean and disinfect the decedent's room. Staff who are conducting this work should be provided with appropriate PPE (minimum gloves).

For personal linens and textiles, staff should put items into sealed plastic bags and then clean and disinfect the outside of the bags before family pickup. If items need to be washed by site staff, they should be laundered as per routine practices generally taken for persons on isolation/additional precautions. This should include washing in warm/hot water, and drying in a hot mechanical drier. Soiled laundry should not be shaken out.

Hard surfaced items should be cleaned and disinfected.

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-environmental-cleaning-public-facilities.pdf>.

Cleaned items should be removed from the room/laundry, put in clean bags, and sent home with family. Bags should be labelled to indicate whether the contents have been cleaned.

Instructions should be provided to families on how to handle belongings that were not cleaned by the care facility including laundering and cleaning items as noted above. Any items that can't be cleaned appropriately (paper documents, card board-boxes, etc.) should be kept in the bag provided by the facility and stored for 72 hours.

Once items are removed, the room should be fully cleaned and disinfected according to site specific policies.

6. Funeral Services Guidelines.

Refer to the Government of Alberta [COVID-19 Relaunch Guidance for Funeral Homes](#) for current information.

7. Handling of deceased persons by non-licensed individuals.

Handling of deceased persons by non-licensed persons (e.g., religious or cultural groups, family or friends) should be minimized, especially in cases of probable/confirmed COVID-19. Washing and dressing the decedent is allowed. Routine practices (see above) must be followed. Individuals 65 years of age and older or with underlying health conditions should be discouraged from participating in these practices.

8. Definitions

Non-licensed person – the person(s) handling deceased bodies do not hold a license issued by the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board (AFSRB) that authorizes the holder to enter into funeral services contracts with members of the public.

Probable Case – a person with clinical illness for COVID-19 who is a close contact of a lab confirmed case, or a person with clinical illness for COVID-19 who meets exposure criteria (e.g. travel) and in whom diagnosis of COVID-19 is inconclusive.

For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.

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Calgary Main Office
Lethbridge Main Office

780-735-1800
403-943-2288
403-388-6689

Grande Prairie Main Office
Red Deer Main Office
www.ahs.ca/eph

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