

COVID-19: How to Handle the Deceased Webinar - Cremation

The following is based on information available as of May 4, 2020.


As of April 20, 2020, there is no definitive answer as to how long the Coronavirus remains active in a deceased individual. While crematory personnel should always follow universal precautions, this is an important time to remind everyone of these guidelines, plus some additional safeguards to take during this time of pandemic to avoid any cross contamination. These suggestions serve as a guideline only:

- 1.** Make sure that upon receipt and handling of any properly encased bodies that all personnel wear all applicable PPE. This should include gloves, mask, face shield and/or goggles, lab coat, shoe covers, as well as a disinfectant spray (make sure you know your product and its effectiveness to work on COVID-19). If your crematory handles the deceased -- as in storage of bodies with later placement into cremation containers that have been sprayed with disinfectant -- then additional PPE should be used which may include full suits and/or gowns. After cleaning and removal of PPE, perform hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or

using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water is not available.

- 2.** Make sure that any bodies received in a container meet your requirements of a leak-proof, sturdy/rigid container, that they are properly tagged for identification and consider having the face of the deceased covered with a barrier that is soaked in a disinfectant. This can aid in preventing any airborne exhalation upon moving the deceased.
- 3.** Make sure that you follow the “social distance” recommendation of 6 feet (2 meters) in all situations possible. This would include upon receiving the deceased; working in your crematory; and upon delivery of cremated remains. Also, for those situations where witnessing is occurring, make sure that you follow the social distance guideline as well as any limitations on gatherings, which most agree is no more than 10 people. If your facility can’t accommodate 10 people while adhering to social distancing, then institute guidelines that represent what you are able to accommodate.

4. Institute a thorough cleaning and disinfecting policy which includes proper cleaning and disinfecting of all surfaces (including the loader); the cremation container; refrigeration doors and handles; all equipment; tables; computers; as well as the final cremation container. Face mask and gloves should be worn when disinfecting. This process should be done between each and every case.
5. Consider any and all ways to limit face-to-face communication. This includes transfer of paperwork and obtaining signatures. Try to implement as many virtual and online methods that are allowed to limit these potential interactions and if you must handle paperwork, be sure to do it in a “clean area.” Try to keep areas secluded for certain activities and avoid cross contamination.
6. Do not forget to follow your normal identification practices during the cremation process. Funeral homes that use your crematory need to know your identification requirements. Most states have ID requirements which should be a part of your standard practices to ensure that your overall process is proper. Identification of the deceased is very important during this time of global pandemic, as mistake can happen when the extra steps of safety and disinfecting break the normal routine.

personnel, it is important that during this time all personnel take a heightened level of precaution. This includes not only around the deceased body, but also around the living. For crematories, all individuals that come into your facility are potentially the family and friends of someone who has died from COVID-19. They may have surrounded the infected patient in their final days, so they are now a major concern for transmission of the virus. We need to become very vigilant in keeping our distance (current suggestion is 6 feet or 2 meters), no handshakes, disinfecting everything between family visit. 

Cremation, as well as embalming and burial, are acceptable methods of disposition for individuals who may be COVID-19 positive. While precautions should always be taken by crematory