

**HOT TIPS # 114** 3/27/2020

Please copy and distribute to ALL physicians at your location.

**Ventura County Suspected COVID-19 Deaths Under Medical Care**

Ventura County Public Health Vital Records is beginning to see COVID-19 listed in the chain of events on the death certificate without laboratory confirmation of infection; these patients were under medical care and not previously reported to VCPH Communicable Disease as suspect COVID-19. All deaths under medical care in Ventura County related to COVID 19 MUST be reported by Confidential Morbidity Report (CMR) by fax to 805- 981-5200 or email to [VCPH-ID@ventura.org](mailto:VCPH-ID@ventura.org) immediately.

- **If a patient dies of SUSPECTED COVID 19 infection:**
  - If antemortem testing is pending at the time of death, only list COVID 19 on the death certificate after confirmation with viral test results.
  - If the physician believes that the death was a PROBABLE COVID 19 related death and testing was NOT performed prior to death, do not release the body to a funeral home until postmortem testing has been performed.
  
- **Recommended Postmortem Testing Protocol for Hospitals:**
  - Do **not** certify the death as COVID 19 related if testing was not performed.
  - If a hospital death is suspected to be COVID 19 related, do not release the body from the hospital until testing has been performed.
  - For a suspected/unconfirmed (not tested) COVID-19 death, hospitals can perform a “swab only” autopsy.
    - Use your standard autopsy consenting protocol and autopsy consent form; the provider should obtain consent from Legal Next of Kin noting restrictions “swab only exam.”
    - NP and OP swabs will be obtained postmortem and should be submitted for testing at the Ventura County Public Health Lab.
    - Unrestricted/standard autopsies are not recommended for these patients.
  
- **Postmortem PPE Recommendations:**
  - Full PPE should be worn when wrapping a body (same as used when treating patient). Body should be double bagged.
  - After patient has been placed in bags, wipe down outer bag with disinfectant wipes. At this point, contact precautions are sufficient.
  - Once patient has been delivered to hospital morgue, wipe down transport morgue cart with disinfectant wipes.

**RECOMMENDED REPORTING AND DEATH CERTIFICATION FOR COVID 19 FOR SUSPECTED DEATHS**

- Do NOT certify deaths as COVID 19 related if there is no test confirmation.

- For suspected COVID 19 hospital deaths with pending COVID 19 testing, wait for the test results before certification.
- For suspected COVID 19 hospital deaths where viral testing was **NOT** performed, **DO NOT** release the body from the hospital until testing has been performed and submitted to the Public Health Laboratory. The body can be released after the specimen is collected and before results are available. Contact Ventura County Vital Statistics at 805-981-5172 (M – F 8 am – 5 pm) to alert them of the suspected case and pending testing. After hours, please call 805-981-5201 to report the death.
- Cases are reportable to the Ventura County Medical Examiner using the normal reporting criteria (e.g. deaths less than 24 hours after admission). COVID 19 deaths under medical care **do not** need to be reported to the Medical Examiner if they do not meet normal reporting criteria.

This bulletin is intended to improve the public health in our county by keeping physicians and nurses informed of noteworthy diagnoses, disease trends and other events of medical interest. Another goal of a public health department is to educate. We hope that you will use this information to increase your awareness. Please allow us to continue in our role of speaking to the press so that we may maximize the educational message to the benefit of all citizens of Ventura County.

### **Communicable Disease Office**

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