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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 has received death certificates with COVID-19 listed in the chain of events but without laboratory confirmation of infection; these patients were under medical care and were not previously reported to VCPH Communicable Disease as suspect COVID-19 cases. All deaths under medical care in Ventura County related to COVID 19 MUST be reported **immediately** by Confidential Morbidity Report (CMR) by fax to 805- 981-5200 or email to VCPH-ID@ventura.org.

- **If a patient dies of SUSPECTED COVID 19 infection:**
 - Medical examiners, coroners, pathologists, and health care providers should immediately notify VCPH Communicable Disease in the event of the identification of a deceased person with suspect or confirmed COVID-19.
 - 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).
 - Standard bagging procedures should be followed, consistent with those used for deaths when there is no confirmed or suspected COVID-19.
 - Given the varying weights of decedents and variety, construction, and conditions of body bag

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materials, postmortem care workers should use prudent judgement determining if risks for puncture, tearing, or failure of body bags could occur and whether a second body bag or a single bag of thicker, stronger material (e.g. minimum of 6 mil thickness) is necessary.

- Risk factors include presence of sharp objects on the decedent.
- Weight of decedent (verify body bag weight capacities as provided by manufacturer.
- Bodily fluids posing exposure risks to workers transporting the body should a puncture, tear, or failure occur.
- Damage or degradation to the body bag that may have occurred in shipment or storage.
- After patient has been placed in bag(s), wipe down outer bag with disinfectant wipes that meet the criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2. 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. If the diagnosis is based on symptoms and a test was not performed it is recommended to certify the death certificate as Probable COVID-19.
- It is essential to document any pre-existing medical conditions that may have contributed to the death in section 112 of the death certificate.
- 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.

Resources

For up to date and detailed information regarding COVID-19 postmortem guidance:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html>

COVID-19 Infection Control

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control.html>

COVID-19 Medicolegal Death Investigators FAQs

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/medicolegal-faq.html>

Funeral Home Workers

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/funeral-fags.html>

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.

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