



MINISTRY OF HEALTH  
SINGAPORE

MH 34:24/8

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3 December 2021

All Funeral Directors and Funeral Parlour Operators

**UPDATES ON MANAGEMENT OF DECEASED PERSONS WITH SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED COVID-19**

This circular provides updates on the management of deceased persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 (“COVID-19 deceased”).

2. The majority of deaths in persons with COVID-19 have hitherto been managed in acute hospital settings. However, as we transit to living with COVID-19, MOH recognises that deaths of persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 may occur outside of the acute hospital setting, such as in the case of persons under palliative care who may opt to pass on at home, or at residential care homes such as nursing homes. **Managing bodies of COVID-19 deceased is generally safe when preventive measures are adhered to, and deceased persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 can be managed safely in both hospitals and the community.**

**WHEN A COVID-19 DECEASED PERSON IS DEEMED TO BE INFECTIOUS**

3. **COVID-19 being listed on the Certificate of Cause of Death (CCOD) is not definitive for whether a COVID-19 deceased will be deemed to be infectious.** Instead, a deceased person is deemed to be infectious and should be managed according to the measures in paragraphs 6 and 7, when ANY of the following criteria are fulfilled, as determined by the medical practitioner issuing the CCOD:

- a) In institutional settings<sup>1</sup>
  - i. All deceased persons who, at the time of demise, were or should have been isolated for the purposes of suspected or confirmed COVID-19<sup>2</sup>
- b) In the Community<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Such as acute and community hospitals, nursing homes, community treatment facilities and inpatient hospices.

<sup>2</sup> Illustration 1: A patient in the general ward is diagnosed with COVID-19 and passes away in the general ward before he/she can be transferred to an isolation room or COVID-19 cohort ward. This patient’s body should be managed as infectious for COVID-19.

Illustration 2: A patient who had been isolated due to known COVID-19 has met de-isolation criteria, but passes away before he/she is transferred to the general ward. This patient’s body need not be managed as infectious for COVID-19.



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- i. Person who tested positive on a COVID-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test and under a period of isolation at the time of demise<sup>4</sup>; or
- ii. Person who tested positive on COVID-19 PCR within 14<sup>5</sup> days of date of demise, and with no known deisolation date; or
- iii. Person who tested positive on COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test (ART) within 14<sup>6</sup> days of date of demise, and with no known subsequent negative ART 72 hours or more from first positive COVID-19 ART; or
- iv. Person with no COVID-19 PCR or ART result and had symptoms of COVID-19 infection at time of demise, and
  - A. Received a Health Risk Warning (HRW) alert in the past 7 days  
OR
  - B. With history of close contact with persons with COVID-19 in the 7 days preceding demise

If none of the above criteria are met, the deceased is deemed not infectious for COVID-19, and may be handled as if the deceased never had COVID-19, except for embalming (see para 8).

4. To ensure safe and proper handling of the deceased by funeral service providers, **a memo by a medical practitioner** (template provided in Annex A) **shall be provided to the funeral service provider engaged** if any of the following conditions are met:

- a) The deceased is deemed to be infectious (per para 3 above); or
- b) COVID-19 is a direct, underlying or contributory cause of death; or
- c) Date of demise is within 28 days of first positive COVID-19 PCR or ART.

5. The responsibility for ensuring that the funeral service provider engaged receives the above memo is determined by the care context at the time of demise:

- a) For COVID-19 deceased in **institutional settings**, institutions shall ensure that the memo is provided to the funeral service provider engaged;
- b) For COVID-19 deceased in the **community**, medical practitioners are required to provide the memo to household members, and inform them that:
  - i. Household members are required to provide the memo to the funeral service provider engaged, to facilitate the safe and proper management of the deceased; and

<sup>3</sup> Conversely, if none of the conditions in 3b are met, deceased may be managed as non-infectious. Non-infectious Illustration 1: Person is asymptomatic and received a HRW alert in the past 7 days.

Non-infectious Illustration 2: Person is symptomatic with no PCR or ART result, without receiving a HRW alert in the past 7 days and without close contact history with persons infected with COVID-19.

<sup>4</sup> For the avoidance of doubt, in cases where the deceased had more than one episode of COVID-19 infection, all references in this circular to the “first” COVID-19 PCR/ART result, or the dating of such results from demise, are in the context of the current or latest COVID-19 infection episode.

<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of deeming a COVID-19 deceased infectious, medical practitioners may exercise clinical discretion in deciding whether a longer (but not shorter) period from COVID-19 PCR positive result should be applied to a particular deceased (e.g. if deceased was immunocompromised).

<sup>6</sup> The principle in footnote 5 is similarly applicable, to time from COVID-19 ART positive result.

- ii. Failure by household members to do so may amount to an offence under the Infectious Diseases Act.

## MEASURES PERTAINING TO MANAGING INFECTIOUS COVID-19 DECEASED

6. The following will apply in the management of infectious COVID-19 deceased:
- a) Vaccination is strongly advised for all personnel
  - b) The following Personal Protective Equipment should be used<sup>7</sup> when managing such persons:
    - i. Surgical Mask;
    - ii. Long-sleeved water-resistant gown. (This is not required after body bag has been placed into hermetically sealed coffin);
    - iii. Gloves; and
    - iv. Eye protection (face shield or goggles) if splashes are anticipated
  - c) Donning of PPE should occur before entering residential premises / ward / cubicle / room of the deceased persons, and doffing should occur before entering clean premises.
  - d) Non-essential contact and manipulation of the deceased's body should be avoided.
  - e) Body of the deceased should not be sprayed, washed or embalmed
  - f) As with non COVID-19 deceased, healthcare workers should perform removal of devices (including venulas, tubes, catheters, pacemakers) before the deceased's body is placed in body bag<sup>8</sup>.
  - g) Enclose the deceased's body in at least one leak-proof body bag and zip bag till fully closed. External surface of body bag to be wiped with disinfectant<sup>9</sup> before transport.
  - h) Avoid opening of the body bag after closure.
  - i) Affix a Biohazard Label to the front of the bag.
  - j) Inform all persons handling, transporting and receiving the body of the biosafety status of the body.
  - k) In the community<sup>10</sup>, environmental cleaning<sup>11</sup> with a disinfectant<sup>12</sup> should apply to the following:
    - i. Immediate premises where the body was handled;
    - ii. All equipment used during the handling process; and
    - iii. Transportation vehicle after transport.

<sup>7</sup> Employees of an institution with a PPE policy should adhere to that prevailing PPE posture if it is more stringent.

<sup>8</sup> This applies in both institutional and community settings.

<sup>9</sup> Please refer to the list of household disinfectants against COVID-19 by NEA: <https://www.nea.gov.sg/our-services/public-cleanliness/environmental-cleaning-guidelines/guidelines/list-of-household-products-and-active-ingredients-for-disinfection-of-covid-19>.

<sup>10</sup> In institutions with an environmental cleaning protocol, the prevailing protocol may be followed.

<sup>11</sup> NEA Guidelines for In-House Cleaning and Disinfection of Areas Exposed to COVID-19 Cases in Non-Healthcare Premises: <https://www.nea.gov.sg/our-services/public-cleanliness/environmental-cleaning-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-for-in-house-cleaning-and-disinfection-of-areas-exposed-to-covid-19-cases-in-non-healthcare-premises>

<sup>12</sup> Please refer to footnote 9.

- l) Body (in the body bag) should be placed in a hermetically sealed coffin. The lid of the coffin is not to be opened at any time and should not have a glass window. Should a coffin without a glass window be unavailable, a hermetically sealed coffin with a sealed window may be used.
- m) Holding of wakes is allowed. As stipulated by NEA, duration of wakes should be kept short.

7. In homes, staff<sup>13</sup> and household members interacting with infectious COVID-19 deceased should be advised of the guidance provided in Annex B. A copy of Annex B may be provided to household members.

8. Embalming should not be performed if:
- a) The deceased is deemed to be infectious; OR
  - b) The deceased is deemed to be non-infectious (per para 3 above), BUT the date of demise is within 28 days of first positive COVID-19 PCR or ART.

9. Infectious COVID-19 deceased should only be managed by staff of funeral service providers who have undergone the Basic Infection Control Course (BICC) conducted by the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID). The list of BICC trained funeral service providers can be referenced at [https://www.ncid.sg/For-General-Public/Pages/List-of-Funeral-Service-Companies-Trained-in-Basic-Infection-Control-Course-\(BICC\).aspx](https://www.ncid.sg/For-General-Public/Pages/List-of-Funeral-Service-Companies-Trained-in-Basic-Infection-Control-Course-(BICC).aspx). Healthcare workers / funeral service providers should inform household members of how to access and use this list early, to facilitate handling of the deceased at the time of demise.

10. For clarification on this circular, please email MOH\_INFO@moh.gov.sg.



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<sup>13</sup> This includes healthcare workers and funeral service providers. Healthcare workers should adhere to institution guidelines if those guidelines are more stringent.

## Annexes

Annex A	SAMPLE MEDICAL PRACTITIONER MEMO FOR PERSONNEL MANAGING DECEASED PERSONS WITH SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED COVID-19
Annex B	GUIDANCE FOR HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS OF INFECTIOUS DECEASED PERSONS WITH SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED COVID-19



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**SAMPLE MEDICAL PRACTITIONER MEMO FOR PERSONNEL MANAGING DECEASED PERSONS WITH SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED COVID-19**

To whom it may concern

Re:

Name of deceased \_\_\_\_\_

UIN \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Time of Death \_\_\_\_\_

Q1. Does the deceased have COVID-19 stated as a cause of death on the certificate of cause of death?	<b>Yes / No*</b>
Q2. Is the deceased's date of demise within 28 days of the first positive COVID-19 PCR / ART?#	<b>Yes / No*</b>
Q3. Should the deceased be managed as infectious for COVID-19?#	<b>Yes / No*</b>

\*Please circle as appropriate.

#Embalming should not be performed if the answer to Q2 and/or Q3 is "Yes".

Other remarks (optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Certifying doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## GUIDANCE FOR HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS OF INFECTIOUS DECEASED PERSONS WITH SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED COVID-19

### What can I expect to happen to my loved one?

You need to select a funeral service provider in the list made available at [https://www.ncid.sg/For-General-Public/Pages/List-of-Funeral-Service-Companies-Trained-in-Basic-Infection-Control-Course-\(BICC\).aspx](https://www.ncid.sg/For-General-Public/Pages/List-of-Funeral-Service-Companies-Trained-in-Basic-Infection-Control-Course-(BICC).aspx). Staff of the listed funeral service providers have undergone the Basic Infection Control Course (BICC) and will handle your loved one according to the measures provided. The funeral service provider will place your loved one in a body bag and clean the body bag in the home. The body bag will then be placed into a casket which will be sealed. Body of the deceased should not be sprayed, washed or embalmed.

### What can I do to protect myself and those around me?

1. As you are a close contact of a deceased person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, you should monitor your health closely and adhere to the prevailing community testing and isolation advice<sup>14</sup>.
2. Wherever possible, you should isolate yourself from the certifying doctor and funeral service providers if:
  - a. You have tested positive on a COVID-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and are under a period of home isolation
  - b. You have tested positive on a COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test (ART) within the last 14 days, and have not obtained a negative COVID-19 ART result 72 hours or more from the time of your positive ART result
3. Minimize interaction with the certifying doctor and funeral service providers, regardless of your test status.
4. Wear a surgical face mask, and where possible, maintain at least 1 metre safe distancing during all interactions with the certifying doctor and funeral service providers.
5. Where possible, windows in the home should be opened to allow for natural ventilation.

### How should I clean my house in order to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19?

1. You may refer to the National Environment Agency Cleaning and Disinfection Guidelines for Households on Home Recovery (<https://www.nea.gov.sg/our-services/public-cleanliness/environmental-cleaning-guidelines/guidelines/cleaning-and-disinfection-guidelines-for-households-on-home-recovery>)

<sup>14</sup> Such as at <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/protecting-the-vulnerable-securing-our-future>