



ADVISORY FOR DISPOSAL OF DEAD BODIES OF COVID- 19 VICTIMS

Objective : To complete the disposing of the dead bodies of the deceased in the shortest possible time following all SOPs and religious rites while exposing least number of Govt staff (Civil/Police and others) and to minimise panic among other people.

The Guidelines from MoHFW, Govt. of India and WHO is exhaustive regarding dead body management for COVID-19 and it requires strict compliance.

Checklist:

A. The Deceased

1. Allot a notified area for burial/cremation in a Govt Khas Jungle land away from habitation so that no community can oppose (preferably in rural area but nearby town area).
2. Ensure that the burial /cremation is also identified to cope with the ensuing flood situation vis a vis COVID19.
3. Allot a person to receive the body from mortuary/Medical College beforehand from Health team
4. In case of an unclaimed victim develop an SOP for safe disposal/burial in consultation with concerned agency including legal issues
5. Notify a COVID Hearse Van with pilot and partner.
6. Ensure PPE wearing training to these key people
7. Assign a police escort tagged to Hearse Van
8. Ensure that a medical team consisting of IDSP officials and others would accompany the hearse van for medical supervision and guidance
9. It is advisable to avoid main town area with the only halt before proceeding to the and burial/cremation ground at the family home of the deceased so

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as to enable the family members to pay respects to the departed soul, if insisted upon.

10. Collect the body of the deceased in a body bag with disinfectants sprayed.

B. The Family

1. There is a high probability that the family is in quarantine during such cases. Breaking of the news needs to be done gently by the right person to the family over phone whilst a Magistrate with Health Officer (preferably of same community) may be outside the premises coordinating and monitoring their mental status. They need to be made to understand why they cannot be allowed to go and pay their last respects at the burial ground.
2. There would be requests for at least seeing the body bag which may be allowed whilst family is indoors for a short while whilst they offer their prayers. The body bag is to be handled only by trained health technician in protective gear.
3. For the ambulance to be brought to quarantine area (optional) if family in quarantine; ensure there is no crowd gathering in the street by strict cordoning through Police in advance.
4. It is preferable that a selected few neighbours/relatives from same community who are not in quarantine may be allowed to speak to the family in person from a distance with all protective gear and taking all precautions, informing them that all rituals may be practiced in the final rites. This helps in calming the family as only interacting with Government officials may cause anxiety. These interactions may be videographed non-intrusively.
5. As grieving times are difficult periods, it is advisable to keep meals ready and some snacks as stock in such quarantine centre areas.

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6. Disinfection teams to be ready through F&ESS of the locality having quarantine centre to prevent further complaints from public. As soon as ambulance leaves, they may be deployed. Quick action would help in keeping fears at bay.

C. Site for burial/cremation

1. Ensure the entire process of burial/cremation is being videographed.
2. The area for burial/cremation needs to be cordoned with heavy armed presence to discourage crowds from gathering.
3. Burial/arrangement of firewood be done well in advance. Labour for the same be handled by the same community that may be locally arranged
4. The area may generally need a JCB to expedite works and save precious time. Please be prepared.
5. Arranging for co-religious labour well in advance saves a lot of time.
6. A disinfectant sprayer with enough quantities of Sodium Hypochlorite solution needs to be taken to the location site for disinfection.
7. Once done, PPEs to be removed and discarded scientifically. Nearby arrangements for bathing of the labour involved may be arranged for immediate relief.
8. Advance preparation of the burial ground is advisable.
9. Nearby villages may be given an awareness campaign on not giving in to fears.
10. In case of burial/cremation, an epitaph may be installed in memory of the deceased

D. Miscellaneous

1. Keep track of time stamps systematically for later record keeping



2. The entire process may be videographed.
3. Ensure there is no breakage from home quarantine by any of the relatives due to panic and grief
4. PPE kits need to be judiciously utilized and discarded carefully.
5. The biggest challenge would be in finding people willing to work and help. Advance preparation with help from same community local leaders would come handy.
6. Media needs to be managed with no stray photos or videos being allowed to take.
7. Keeping less number of people involved would help handle it quicker.
8. Facilitating Priest/Imam/Father, neighbours, relatives, labour during time of lockdown would be challenging and needs smooth communication and coordination with Police with spare vehicles and willing drivers.
9. Waste management of all PPE/mask/gloves post burial need to be disposed in a planned fashion ensuring safety measures
10. Awareness training campaigns may be repeatedly taken for entire team including police to keep fear at bay.
11. Assign a unique code to the dead bodies and ensure maintenance of proper records of each dead person including Area/site of burial or cremation
12. In case the COVID-19 deceased is from other District/State/Country, establish contact with local administration /appropriate authority of the place from where the deceased hails to ensure handing over of the dead body or seek written consent from the relatives/ authority for disposing of the dead body in the district/place in which the person died.
13. In case of cremation, mortal remains may be preserved for handing over to the family of the deceased person as the case maybe.

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14. In addition to this advisory, the guidelines issued by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India and the SOP issued by Health & Family Welfare Department, Govt. of Assam should be strictly complied.
15. Orientation to be given to persons handling dead body till its cremation or burial.
16. Respective Authorities to be sensitised in managing the same along with a dedicated system for tracking the completion of each procedure.
17. The supervising officers must be entrusted with clear cut responsible for certifying each and every process.
18. Infection Prevention Protocol to be followed.
19. Proper disposal of medical waste like PPE Kit should be followed as per CPCB guidelines of Bio Medical Waste Management.
20. A proper system has to be ensured at the crematorium/ Burial places.
21. Mass Gathering should be avoided during the cremation/ Burial and common protocols of wearing masks, physical distancing and hand washing to be ensured.

COVID-19: Guidelines on Dead Body Management issued by Government of India (MoHFW):

Standard Precautions to be followed by health care workers while handling dead bodies of COVID.

Standard infection prevention control practices should be followed at all times.

These include:

1. Hand hygiene.
2. Use of personal protective equipment (e.g., water resistant apron, gloves, masks, eyewear).
3. Safe handling of sharps.

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4. Disinfect bag housing dead body; instruments and devices used on the patient.
5. Disinfect linen. Clean and disinfect environmental surfaces.

Training in infection and prevention control practices

All staff identified to handle dead bodies in the isolation area, mortuary, ambulance and those workers in the crematorium / burial ground should be trained in the infection prevention control practices.

Removal of the body from the isolation room or area

The health worker attending to the dead body should perform hand hygiene, ensure proper use of PPE (water resistant apron, goggles, N95 mask, gloves).

- All tubes, drains and catheters on the dead body should be removed.
- Any puncture holes or wounds (resulting from removal of catheter, drains, tubes, or otherwise) should be disinfected with 1% hypochlorite and dressed with impermeable material.
- Apply caution while handling sharps such as intravenous catheters and other sharp devices. They should be disposed into a sharps container.
- Plug Oral, nasal orifices of the dead body to prevent leakage of body fluids.
- If the family of the patient wishes to view the body at the time of removal from the isolation room or area, they may be allowed to do so with the application of Standard Precautions.
- Place the dead body in leak-proof plastic body bag. The exterior of the body bag can be decontaminated with 1% hypochlorite. The body bag can be wrapped with a mortuary sheet or sheet provided by the family members.
- The body will be either handed over to the relatives or taken to mortuary.
- All used/ soiled linen should be handled with standard precautions, put in bio-hazard bag and the outer surface of the bag disinfected with hypochlorite solution.



- Used equipment should be autoclaved or decontaminated with disinfectant solutions in accordance with established infection prevention control practices.
- All medical waste must be handled and disposed of in accordance with Bio-medical waste management rules.
- The health staff who handled the body will remove personal protective equipment and will perform hand hygiene.
- Provide counseling to the family members and respect their sentiments.

Environmental cleaning and disinfection

All surfaces of the isolation area (floors, bed, railings, side tables, IV stand, etc.) should be wiped with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite solution; allow a contact time of 30 minutes, and then allowed to air dry.

Handling of dead body in Mortuary

- Mortuary staff handling COVID dead body should observe standard precautions.
- Dead bodies should be stored in cold chambers maintained at approximately 4°C.
- The mortuary must be kept clean. Environmental surfaces, instruments and transport trolleys should be properly disinfected with 1% Hypochlorite solution.
- After removing the body, the chamber door, handles and floor should be cleaned with sodium hypochlorite 1% solution.

Embalming

Embalming of dead body should not be allowed.

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Autopsies on COVID-19 dead bodies

Autopsies should be avoided. If autopsy is to be performed for special reasons, the following infection prevention control practices should be adopted:

- The Team should be well trained in infection prevention control practices.
- The number of forensic experts and support staff in the autopsy room should be limited.
- The Team should use full complement of PPE (coveralls, head cover, shoe cover, N 95 mask, goggles / face shield).
- Round ended scissors should be used
- PM40 or any other heavy duty blades with blunted points to be used to reduce prick injuries
- Only one body cavity at a time should be dissected
- Unfixed organs must be held firm on the table and sliced with a sponge – care should be taken to protect the hand
- Negative pressure to be maintained in mortuary. An oscillator saw with suction extraction of the bone aerosol into a removable chamber should be used for sawing skull, otherwise a hand saw with a chain-mail glove may be used
- Needles should not be re-sheathed after fluid sampling – needles and syringes should be placed in a sharps bucket.
- Reduce aerosol generation during autopsy using appropriate techniques especially while handling lung tissue.
- After the procedure, body should be disinfected with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite and placed in a body bag, the exterior of which will again be decontaminated with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite solution.
- The body thereafter can be handed over to the relatives.
- Autopsy table to be disinfected as per standard protocol.

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Transportation

- The body, secured in a body bag, exterior of which is decontaminated poses no additional risk to the staff transporting the dead body.
- The personnel handling the body may follow standard precautions (surgical mask, gloves).
- The vehicle, after the transfer of the body to cremation/ burial staff, will be decontaminated with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite.

At the crematorium/ Burial Ground

The Crematorium/ burial Ground staff should be sensitized that COVID 19 does not pose additional risk.

- The staff will practice standard precautions of hand hygiene, use of masks and gloves.
- Viewing of the dead body by unzipping the face end of the body bag (by the staff using standard precautions) may be allowed, for the relatives to see the body for one last time.
- Religious rituals such as reading from religious scripts, sprinkling holy water and any other last rites that does not require touching of the body can be allowed.
- Bathing, kissing, hugging, etc. of the dead body should not be allowed.
- The funeral/ burial staff and family members should perform hand hygiene after cremation/ burial.
- The ash does not pose any risk and can be collected to perform the last rites.
- Large gathering at the crematorium/ burial ground should be avoided as a social distancing measure as it is possible that close family contacts may be symptomatic and/ or shedding the virus.