



BODY MANAGEMENT - COVID -19 PANDEMIC

Document ID			
Document Type	WORK INSTRUCTION		
Date Effective		Next Review Date	
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Background

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a highly contagious infection spreading rapidly around the world. To date there is no evidence of transmission of COVID-19 through the handling of bodies of deceased persons. The potential risk of transmission for those handling bodies with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 is therefore currently considered to be LOW. Any risk of transmission relates to:

- direct contact with human remains or bodily fluids where the virus is present
- aerosol-generating procedures involving human remains, such as using high pressure hoses.

Even though the potential risk of transmission is considered to be low in the context of our work at the VIFM, we are obliged as far as is reasonably practicable, to provide and maintain for our employees a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. The VIFM has therefore determined to implement strict protocols for case management where there is reason to believe the deceased was exposed to, or has been confirmed as having contracted, COVID-19.

Scope

The instructions below apply to all cases reported to the VIFM where there is evidence suggesting the deceased has been exposed to or has been confirmed as having contracted COVID-19. Managers in Forensic Technical Services, CAE and Forensic Pathology Services are responsible for ensuring their staff know about and understand these work instructions. All relevant staff are expected to comply with these instructions.

Body Management Work Instructions for suspected COVID-19 cases

Report of death

Risk factors

The incoming call to the Coronial Admissions and Enquiries (CAE) is the first notification of the deceased to the VIFM. CAE nurses accept calls from treating doctors and police who may report risk factors for COVID-19, including:



- Cases known to have tested positive for COVID-19 (such cases are not reportable to the coroner on this basis alone, however there may be other reasons for the report of death to the coroner e.g. accident, death in custody)
- Close association with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19
- Clinical symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 infection (fever and respiratory distress)
- Recent overseas travel (within the last 14 days)

Who to notify regarding risk factors

Should any of the above risk factors be present, the CAE nurse must notify:

- *via Contact Log entry:*
 - Manager, CAE and FTS
 - Assistant Manager, FTS
 - Head of Pathology, FPS
- *via the notes section on the SJA portal:* St Johns Ambulance (SJA) transfer staff regarding heightened risk during transfer of the deceased. This is to be given - as “COVID-19 with risk factors”
- *Via phone communication if a regional transfer*
- *via email to dl_mortuary:* Forensic Technical Service (FTS) to let the staff know there may be a heightened infection risk during management of the identified case(s).

Occasionally a funeral director/transfer staff may alert Forensic Technical Staff that a case is “possible COVID-19 positive” at the time of presentation at the VIFM. Staff should treat the case as a “Risk factors for COVID-19” case and make a note in case notes of the funeral director advice. Email dl_mortuary_seniors” to alert.

Admission procedures

PPE to be worn when admitting and scanning a ‘Risk factors for COVID-19’ case

- Scrubs
- Eye wear
- Surgical/P2 mask
- Disposable long sleeve gown (due to coronial cases having an increased incidence of externalised body fluids such as blood or decomposition fluid)
- Double gloves
- Gumboots

The body is to be admitted under normal admission procedures. All paperwork should be handled with clean gloves, **but not** the same gloves used during transfer/removal of property /clothing.

All bodies are to be contained within a body bag.

Following normal admission procedures, and after the body is placed in storage, the outer disposable gown and gloves are to be removed.

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Stickers on body bags

When notified by the CAE of a deceased with any of the identified risk factors FTS staff must place an orange sticker on the head end of body bag or covering during admission and on the body tag attached to the wrist.



This is a visual indication to FTS staff of the potential risk of COVID-19 infection for themselves, pathologists and for funeral personnel who will collect the deceased.

Place the body in normal storage with sticker clearly visible.

Paperwork

It is unlikely, but possible, that COVID-19 infectious particles may be present on documents including chain of custody, hospital and police documents provided to the CAE following admission.

Staff who scan and upload documents should use sensible measures for infection control:

- avoid unnecessary contact, by conducting paperwork tasks in batches at dedicated intervals in the day
- washing hands before and after each batch is done, and avoiding touching your face
- wiping down the scanner with a sanitiser following upload of documents received via the mortuary.

Risk Assessment and testing

Preliminary Examination

The duty pathologist will assess available information during the Preliminary Examination process including conducting a clinical risk assessment of the medical history and review of the CT scan.

If the duty pathologist identifies a risk factor for COVID-19 they must:

- note this on the preliminary report
- follow the *Post-mortem Testing for COVID-19 at the VIFM Policy and Procedure* [PP-38-PMTC-1.0]

Autopsy

The autopsy case pathologist must follow the *Post-mortem Testing for COVID-19 at the VIFM Policy and Procedure* [PP-38-PMTC-1.0] to determine if testing is required.

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Examination of deceased with COVID-19 risk factors

'No autopsy' cases (Inspection and report)

Any case/s at risk for COVID-19 should be examined following the completion of all other inspections rather than intermittently throughout.

PPE for Forensic technicians:

- Scrubs
- Eye wear
- Surgical/P2 mask
- Disposable long sleeve gown (due to coronial cases having an increased incidence of externalised body fluids such as blood/decomposition fluid)
- Double gloves
- Gumboots

Change gloves and outer gown following handling a case with "COVID-19 risk factors"

Actions following testing – stickers

Forensic technicians must check with the case pathologist for results of testing.

- If a test result has been returned NEGATIVE remove sticker from body bag.
- If positive or no result, ensure sticker demonstrating potential infectious status remains prominently displayed upon completion of the inspection.

Mortuary practices for autopsy cases

(Prior to the autopsy examination the case pathologist will assess the risk factors, determine if they are still applicable, and ensure that the case continues to be managed as a "Risk factors for COVID-19 present" case, unless and until the results of COVID-19 testing are confirmed as NEGATIVE)

For cases determined to still have risk factors for COVID-19:

- Wherever possible isolate cases with identified COVID-19 risk factors.
- Position non-COVID-19 cases as far as practical away from cases assessed as having risk factors

If not possible to isolate or distance cases with COVID-19 risk factors, perform COVID-19 risk cases together (consecutively) at a designated time.

Minimise aerosol generating procedures, and in particular avoid the use of power saws (vertebral body marrow should only be taken if necessary, as directed by the case pathologist).

Post Examination processes

Washing the deceased

Wash ALL cases, and not just those with COVID-19 risk factors, as follows:

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- ensure no other staff are present in the wash bay
- use low pressure with clean water flow
- use COLD water
- keep splashes to an absolute minimum (no nozzle/spray attachment)
- NO washing to take place bench side

PPE discard for cases with COVID-19 risk factors

- Remove all outer PPE and place in biohazard waste
- Remove gown and place in linen bag
- Ensure boots are washed during cleaning processes

Body Management for cases with COVID-19 risk factors

- Place the deceased in a body bag.
- If known positive- double bag the body
- Ensure the COVID-19 Risk factor sticker is displayed before returning the case to refrigeration.

Cleaning

- Clean benches with the usual mortuary chemical cleaning product, Foam Chlor
- After washing, leave benches at least 5 minutes before rinsing
- Use cool water to minimise spread of contaminated aerosols
- Make sure other staff are at a safe distance and can't be splashed

Case Release - stickers

The orange sticker indication risk for COVID-19 will reflect the status available at the time of the examination. If a **confirmed negative** result is received prior to case release FTS staff will endeavour to remove the sticker.

If the sticker remains present upon release, Funeral Directors will be directed to the signage (below) in the release area. Funeral Directors should take their own precautions in relation to cases identified as having COVID-19 risk factors.

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- Cases with this sticker have risk factors for COVID-19
- Use universal precautions when handling these deceased persons
- This is confidential information and is for your safety purposes only

Definitions

CAE	Coronial Admissions and Enquiries
FTS	Forensic Technical Staff
SJA	St Johns Ambulance
COVID-19	Novel coronavirus

References

1. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Considerations related to the safe handling of bodies of deceased persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Stockholm: ECDC; 2020.

Related documents

Document ID	Document Name
PP-38-PMTC	Testing for COVID-19 at the VIFM Policy and Procedure

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Changes since last revision

Section	Changes
	N/A

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