

Date:	April 6, 2020
To:	Northern Health Clinical Staff and Physicians
From:	Penny Anguish, NI COO, Northern Health Operational Lead for COVID-19 Response Deanna Hembroff, Regional Manager Infection Prevention and Control Dr Randal Dumont, Medical Director of Microbiology, Northern Interior
CC:	Angela De Smit, NE COO; Ciro Panessa, NW COO; Northern Health Medical Directors; Dr Ronald Chapman; Jim Fitzpatrick, HEMBC; NH EOC
Re:	COVID 19 Response - Safe Handling of Bodies of Deceased Persons with Suspected or Confirmed COVID19 and Morgue Capacity

To ensure the safety of staff, families and funeral homes operators in handling bodies of deceased persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, a provincial guideline is available to inform standardized operating procedures and to address specific COVID-19 considerations – the guideline can be found at on the BCCDC website:

http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID19_SafeHandlingBodies.pdf

In recognition that communication of decedent’s COVID-19 status and details may not include complete, reliable information, ALL bodies of deceased persons must be handled diligently using the precautions outlined in the guideline.

Background

The evidence regarding the risks of COVID-19 transmission from handling the bodies of deceased persons suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 is in preliminary stages of development. In the interim, it is appropriate to handle all deceased persons in accordance with the much more robust body of evidence that exists for cases of influenza. The potential risk of transmission is considered low if appropriate droplet PPE use and disposal practices are followed during handling of bodies as outlined in the provincial guideline.

If you require more information about the provincial guideline, resources include:

- Deanna Hembroff, Regional Manager Infection Prevention and Control
- Dr Randal Dumont, Medical Director of Microbiology, Northern Interior

Related Information

There is a provincial Mortuary Planning Task Group with Northern Health representation that is clarifying coroner and hospital roles and responsibilities in procedures related to deaths of individuals during this pandemic. This task group is also assessing approaches to respectful storage of deceased persons and local morgue capacity, including additional capacity required over the next months. Jana Hargreaves, HEMBC Coordinator, is the Northern Health Representative and can be reached at jana.hargreaves@northernhealth.ca if you would like more information about this provincial task group.