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COVID-19: SOP for Dead Body Management

Issued in public interest by: Directorate of Health
Services, Jammu

Reference:

COVID-19 Guidelines on Dead Body Management
by MoHFW, Government of India

STANDARD PRECAUTIONS TO BE FOLLOWED BY HEALTH CARE WORKERS WHILE HANDLING DEAD BODIES OF COVID-19

- Hand Hygiene
- Use of PPE (Water Resistant Apron, gloves, masks, eyewear.)
- Safe Handling of Sharps.
- Disinfect bag housing dead body; instruments and devices used on the patient.
- Disinfect linen. Clean and disinfect environmental surfaces

REMOVAL OF THE BODY FROM THE ISOLATION ROOM OR AREA:

- Perform hand hygiene; ensure proper use of PPE (water resistant apron, goggles, N95 mask, gloves).
- Remove all tubes, drains and catheters on the dead body
- Disinfect any puncture holes or wounds with 1% hypochlorite and dress with impermeable material.
- Sharps such as intravenous catheters and other sharp devices should be disposed into a sharps container.
- Plug Oral, nasal orifices of the dead body to prevent leakage of body fluids.
- Family of the patient may be allowed to view the body 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.
- 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 counselling 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 allow 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.

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, should be decontaminated with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite
- Embalming of dead body should not be allowed

PREREQUISITES FOR IDENTIFICATION FOR CREMATION / BURIALGROUND

- District Administration to identify exclusive Cremation / Burial Ground for COVID – 19 victims.
- The location of the cremation ground/ Burial ground should be such that HEARSE carrying the dead body should be able to transport the body near to the funeral pyre/ grave.
- Cremation ground/Burial Ground should have overhead shed at the site to protect persons attending funeral from heat.
- Cremation ground/Burial Ground should have potable drinking water and provision for soap.
- Local police & District Administration to supervise the burial/ cremation and provide necessary support and crowd management.

AT THE CREMATORIUM/ BURIALGROUND

- 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.
- Trained municipal workers/ hired workers to act as coffin/ casket bearers.
- Trained municipal workers/ hired workers to assist and handle the dead body at the cremation ground.
- One or two family members may assist placing the body on pyre or in grave while wearing gloves & masks.
- 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.
- Senior citizens above 65 yrs/ children/ people suffering from respiratory illness/ diabetes/ cardiac conditions/ immune compromised and other life threatening diseases should avoid attending cremation/ burial until it is absolutely necessary.