COVID-19 has health care providers wondering how to protect themselves. If a person dies, and has known or suspected COVID-19, there are universal precautions to take. There are ways to support the family during this difficult time.

The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has given guidance on Safe Handling of Bodies of Deceased Persons with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19. The sections include:

- General recommendations
- Preparations for transport from a health care facility, community settings (e.g., home) and remote and isolated communities
- Bathing, dressing and viewing the body
- Considerations for embalming, burial, and cremation

First Nations Health Authority does not have a specific policy on care of the body after death; the link above to the BCCDC website will provide the most up to date guidance.

Your community has specific practices on care of body after death, however, if the person has suspected or confirmed COVID-19 it is important to send your loved one to the Spirit World safely.

### Handling of the deceased body by health care providers

Workers should always wear disposable gloves and long-sleeved fluid-resistant gowns when handling the deceased.

If there is a risk for splashes from the patient's body fluids or secretions onto the worker's body or face, then a fluid-resistant surgical/procedure mask and eye protection should be worn as well.

All single use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be immediately disposed of in an appropriate receptacle.

Follow Routine Practices, which include the appropriate use of PPE, performing diligent hand hygiene with plain soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70% alcohol content), appropriate cleaning and disinfecting of equipment, and appropriate environmental cleaning.

After viewing the deceased by family, the workers should place the deceased in a clean, leak-proof body bag; and disinfect the outside of the body bag and gurney handles.

Transporting of the deceased has infection control considerations. Nurses handling the deceased should read and follow the Safe Handling of Bodies of Deceased Persons with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19.
### CARE OF THE DECEASED BODY

| Family touching the deceased | Let the family know they can say good bye to their loved one by touching the hands of the deceased, but not the face.(1)  
Show the family how to wash their hands before and after touching the body.(1)  
Family can touch the body if it is un-embalmed or embalmed.(1)  
Current guidelines suggest family should not bath the body, unless they have knowledge of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).(1) |
| Cultural rituals and considerations | Transition to the spiritual life is important to family.(3) Let the family know they can have their traditional ceremony/celebration of life to say good bye to their loved one once the pandemic is over and that it is something to look forward to.  
**Ask the family:** “What cultural supports or rituals are important to you and might help you?” (e.g., prayers, cedar brushing, smudging, visit from Elder, sacred fire).  
Assist families and communities with creative ways to honour, respect and value traditions, given current restrictions on size of gatherings.  
The deceased with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 can be buried or cremated as usual.(1) |
| Funerals/ traditional protocols that involve gatherings | Public health advice is changing rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Check [First Nations Health Authority Coronavirus](https://www.firstnationshealthauthority.ca/) for the latest information.  
Small gatherings may or may not be permitted before or after death of the individual. |

### References:


### Further Reading:
Virtual Hospice - [Care of the Body After Death](http://virtualhospice.ca)