

CARE OF THE DECEASED BODY

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.

	<p>The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has given guidance on Safe Handling of Bodies of Deceased Persons with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19⁽¹⁾. The sections include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Handling of the deceased body by health care providers</p>	<p>Workers should always wear disposable gloves and long-sleeved fluid-resistant gowns when handling the deceased.⁽¹⁾</p> <p>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.⁽¹⁾</p> <p>All single use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be immediately disposed of in an appropriate receptacle.^(1, 2)</p> <p>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.^(1, 2)</p> <p>After viewing the deceased by family, the workers should place the deceased in a clean, leak-proof body bag⁽¹⁾; and disinfect the outside of the body bag and gurney handles.⁽¹⁾</p> <p>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⁽¹⁾.</p>

CARE OF THE DECEASED BODY

<p>Family touching the deceased</p>	<p>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⁾</p> <p>Show the family how to wash their hands before and after touching the body.⁽¹⁾</p> <p>Family can touch the body if it is un-embalmed or embalmed.⁽¹⁾</p> <p>Current guidelines suggest family should not bath the body, unless they have knowledge of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).⁽¹⁾</p>
<p>Cultural rituals and considerations</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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).</p> <p>Assist families and communities with creative ways to honour, respect and value traditions, given current restrictions on size of gatherings.</p> <p>The deceased with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 can be buried or cremated as usual.⁽¹⁾</p>
<p>Funerals/ traditional protocols that involve gatherings</p>	<p>Public health advice is changing rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Check First Nations Health Authority Coronavirus for the latest information.</p> <p>Small gatherings may or may not be permitted before or after death of the individual.</p>

References:

- (1) BC Centre for Disease Control – [Safe Handling of Bodies of Deceased Persons with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#)
- (2) Routine Practices and Additional Precautions for Preventing the Transmission of Infection in Healthcare Settings - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/nosocomial-occupational-infections/routine-practices-additional-precautions-preventing-transmission-infection-healthcare-settings.html>
- (3) BC Centre for Palliative Care - [Symptom Management Guidelines](#) (Nurturing Psychosocial and Spiritual Well Being)

Further Reading:

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