

## COVID-19 and Funerals: March 29, 2020

### Am I at risk if I go to a funeral or visitation service for someone who died of COVID-19?

- There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19.
- Per the Governor's stay-at-home order, funerals cannot exceed 10 people while the order is in place.

### Am I at risk if I touch someone who died of COVID-19 after they have passed away?

- COVID-19 is a new disease and **we are still learning how it spreads**. The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to mainly spread from close contact (i.e., within about 6 feet) with a person who is currently sick with COVID-19. The virus likely spreads primarily through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory infections spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. This type of spread is not a concern after death.
- It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.
- People should consider not touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19. Older people and people of all ages with severe underlying health conditions are at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness. There may be less of a chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging after the body has been prepared for viewing. Other activities, such as kissing, washing and shrouding should be avoided before, during and after the body has been prepared, if possible. If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible. At a minimum, people conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required (such as disposable gown, face shield or goggles and face mask).
- Cleaning should be conducted in accordance with manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). Choose [products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#). After removal of PPE, wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. Soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled.

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### What do funeral home workers need to know about handling decedents who had COVID-19?

- A funeral or visitation service can be held for a person who has died of COVID-19. Funeral home workers should follow their routine infection prevention and control precautions when handling a decedent who died of COVID-19. If it is necessary to transfer a body to a bag, follow [standard precautions](#), including additional PPE if splashing of fluids is expected. For transporting a body after the body has been bagged, disinfect the outside of the bag with a [product with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#) expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder-to-kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). Wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling the body bag.
- Embalming can be conducted. During embalming, follow standard precautions including the use of additional PPE if splashing is expected (e.g. disposable gown, face shield or goggles and face mask). Wear appropriate respiratory protection if any procedures will generate aerosols or if required for chemicals used in accordance with the manufacturer's label. Wear heavy-duty gloves over nitrile disposable gloves if there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds or other injuries that break the skin. Additional information on how to safely conduct aerosol-generating procedures is in the [CDC's Postmortem Guidance](#). Cleaning should be conducted in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. [Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#) are expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder-to-kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- After cleaning and removal of PPE, perform [hand hygiene](#) by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water is not available. Soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled.
- Decedents with COVID-19 can be buried or cremated, but check for any additional state and local requirements that may dictate the handling and disposition of the remains of individuals who have died of certain infectious diseases.

### What should I do if my family member died from COVID-19 while overseas?

- When a U.S. citizen dies outside the United States, the deceased person's next of kin or legal representative should notify U.S. consular officials at the Department of State. Consular personnel are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide assistance to U.S. citizens for overseas emergencies.

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- If a family member, domestic partner or legal representative is in a different country from the deceased person, he or she should call the Department of State's Office of Overseas Citizens Services in Washington, D.C. from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday, at 888-407-4747 (toll-free) or 202-501-4444.
- For emergency assistance after working hours or on weekends and holidays, call the Department of State switchboard at 202-647-4000 and ask to speak with the Overseas Citizens Services duty officer.
- In addition, the [U.S. embassy](#) closest to or in the country where the U.S. citizen died can provide assistance.

## My family member died of COVID-19 while overseas. What are the requirements for returning the body to the United States?

- CDC does not require an autopsy before the remains of a person who died overseas are returned to the United States. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the death, some countries may require an autopsy. Sources of support to the family include the local consulate or embassy, travel insurance provider, tour operator, faith-based and aid organizations, and the deceased's employer. There likely will need to be an official identification of the body and official documents issued by the consular office.
- CDC requirements for importing human remains depend upon if the body has been embalmed, cremated or if the person died from a [quarantinable communicable disease](#).
- At this time, COVID-19 is a quarantinable communicable disease in the United States and the remains must meet the standards for importation found in 42 Code of Federal Regulations Part 71.55 and may be cleared, released and authorized for entry into the United States only under the following conditions:
  - The remains are cremated; OR
  - The remains are properly embalmed and placed in a hermetically sealed casket; OR
  - The remains are accompanied by a permit issued by the CDC Director. The CDC permit (if applicable) must accompany the human remains at all times during shipment.
    - Permits for the importation of the remains of a person known or suspected to have died from a quarantinable communicable disease may



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be obtained through the CDC Division of Global Migration and Quarantine by calling the CDC Emergency Operations Center at 770-488-7100 or emailing [dgmqpolicyoffice@cdc.gov](mailto:dgmqpolicyoffice@cdc.gov).

Please see [CDC's guidance](#) for additional information.