

CCMS UPDATE

Coronavirus Preparedness for Death Care Professionals 2020 March

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Coronavirus

Coronavirus, also referred to as COVID 19, is spreading easily and quickly throughout countries all over the world. It is transmitted through respiratory droplets expelled by an infected person during coughing and sneezing.

On Wednesday the World Health Organization (WHO) labeled Coronavirus a pandemic, as the number of countries affected continues to rise rapidly. In the last two days the United States has banned flights to Europe, and sporting and other major events have been cancelled throughout the world. An abundance of primary, secondary and postsecondary schools have been closed or moved to online or virtual classes, with additional moves away from the seated classroom occurring daily.

Yet, there is still much that is unknown about the virus. In our research we have currently not found known data in regards to how long the virus survives in human remains after death. However, after consulting with an infectious disease specialist, we are told that based upon comparable organisms its survival rate in deceased remains could be similar to the cold or flu.

There are varying reports in regards to how long the coronavirus survives on hard surfaces. It was explained to us that under ideal circumstances it has been shown to live up to 9 days. However, it is normally much shorter and it is susceptible to all disinfectants that you would use against the cold or flu.

If the decision is made to move to virtual or online classes for a period of time, President Jack Lechner will make an announcement. Information will also be shared if scheduled on-campus events such as Open House or continuing education presentations are cancelled. Please stay tuned as The Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science continues to monitor events closely.

Global Map



As of 12:00 p.m. ET March 11, 2020

Global case numbers are reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) in their coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) situation report. For U.S. information, visit CDC's COVID-19 in the U.S.

Photo: A global map taken from the CDC website indicates countries affected by Coronavirus

Generalized Self-Care to Reduce Risk of Infection

To reduce your risk for contracting any virus you should practice regular and thorough handwashing techniques. When washing your hands you should lather well with soap for at least 20 seconds. Singing Happy Birthday or the ABC Song is said to be the equivalent.

Hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol can be used between handwashing, when you simply cannot get to a sink. Hand sanitizer, however, should never be a replacement for thorough handwashing. Soap and water are the safest practice, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Do not use your hands to cover a sneeze or cough. Rather, use the crook of your elbow or a tissue. Tissues should be immediately disposed of in a proper trash receptacle.

Keep your home and vehicles clean and disinfected. Routinely clean hard surfaces such as those in your kitchens and restrooms including counter tops, door knobs and handles. Other "commonly touched" items should be disinfected often such as television remotes, cell phones and landline handsets. Steering wheels, door handles, and knobs and buttons on the panels of vehicles should be disinfected as well.

Avoid close contact. Standing at least six feet from others allows for the avoidance of handshaking and reduces the potential exposure to bodily fluids, including expelled respiratory droplets.

Wear a facemask if you choose to be cautious. If you are feeling ill, have a fever or cough, or have been in contact with someone exposed to the virus you should absolutely wear a facemask.

If exposed to someone with the coronavirus you should also self-quarantine to reduce the risk of further spreading it. If you are feeling ill see a medical professional right away for diagnosis and care.

The CDC lists the primary symptoms of coronavirus as fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, and possible shortness of breath in the most severe cases.

Summary:

- ✓ Clean hands often
- ✓ Do not touch your face
- ✓ Avoid close contact with others
- ✓ Stay home if you are sick
- ✓ Cover coughs and sneezes
- ✓ Clean and disinfect often

Safety While Transferring and Embalming Remains Infected with Coronavirus

Caring for a community and the families you serve requires that you and your colleagues remain healthy. In addition to the general self-care required for your health and safety, death care workers have additional requirements due to their risk of exposure during the transfer and final care of deceased remains. Luckily, training in the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is standard for death care professionals. Home removals should not change this practice. Communication with families explaining what they will see and experience while you are in their home is always important. Family members will then understand what you are doing, and why. This communication should include your explanation of the use of PPE. Utilizing your knowledge of standard PPE is essential for your safety and the safety of those around you, and is a best practice within our profession. If you are communicating well, families will better understand your role and will appreciate the care you are taking of them, their loved one, and yourself.

Continue to work cautiously within your work environment to protect yourself and others. Concurrent disinfection during embalming is crucial. The proper terminal disinfection of your facility, prep room and vehicles is equally as important. Disinfectant items should be readily available for employees. Within your prep room the thorough cleaning of hard surfaces, table tops, instruments, door knobs, cabinet handles, disposal mechanisms (such as sumps), and floors must be given careful cleaning and disinfecting. This should not be just in conjunction with a pandemic, but as part of your daily practice.

The Importance of Universal Precautions



The coronavirus pandemic reminds us of the importance of reviewing and practicing even the most basic workplace practices.

We encourage that all funeral homes and transport personnel do the following:

- ✓ Review the proper and safest method of handwashing and train employees on this “best practice” for their safety and the safety of those around them.
- ✓ Review the proper donning and doffing of PPE and train employees on the “best practice” for their safety and the safety of those around them.
- ✓ Keep transfer vehicles and prep rooms stocked with proper PPE, disinfectants and trash receptacles.
- ✓ Transfer (i.e. removal) PPE should include a face mask, eye protection, Nitrile gloves, disposable and long-sleeved plastic gowns, and shoe covers.
- ✓ Embalming PPE should include a face mask, eye protection, double Nitrile gloves, scrubs, fluid resistant gowns covered with a disposable, long-sleeved plastic gown, head covers and shoe covers.
- ✓ When moving deceased remains that aren’t contained within a plastic pouch or wrapped securely in sheeting, cover the mouth and nose before moving. A facemask placed on the deceased will stay secure, unlike toweling or tissue, which can slide off the face of the deceased when being moved. The mask will keep air from potentially being manually expelled and becoming airborne during the movement of remains from the place of death to the mortuary cot or table.



Useful Links

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/hcp/ppe-training/index.html>

Included here is a video on donning and doffing PPE properly

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm>

Included here are disinfection techniques that could also be used in a business or home

Thank you to the many people involved in various discussions and research sessions to try to get us as up-to-date information as possible, including: President Jack Lechner, Beth Williams, John Vinnedge, Mike Gedhart and Pete Minges. A very special thank you to Dr. Shawn Gibbs, Executive Associate Dean and Professor of Environmental Health at Indiana University, School of Public Health, Bloomington.

Please stay tuned for a save the date announcement of a virtual presentation by Dr. Gibbs. CCMS will host his presentation on Coronavirus and Infectious Disease as a free community resource for our fellow death care professionals.

Please stay healthy and safe and take care of yourself and those around to you.