



# Los Angeles County COVID-19 Decedent Management Guidelines for Hospitals



## Purpose

This document serves as guidance for hospitals regarding decedent care for positive and presumptive COVID-19 cases. The guidance in this document was put together by the Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner (ME-C), the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Agency, and the Department of Public Health. Hospitals are encouraged to review the *Mass Fatality Management Guide for Healthcare Entities* (MFMG) found at this link [http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/dhs/206150\\_1MFMG4HE.pdf](http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/dhs/206150_1MFMG4HE.pdf), and refer to their Mass Fatality plan or policy.

## Principals

- The Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner is the lead agency in any mass fatality incident.
- Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) recipients are required to have a mass fatality plan or policy.

## Guidelines

### Decedent Handling and Storage

- Standard precautions should be followed for handling and processing positive or presumptive COVID-19 decedents.
- Decedents should be completely wrapped in a non-porous material such as plastic sheeting or placed in a single body bag. A specialized disaster body pouch is not required.
- Hospitals are responsible for storing decedents until mortuary arrangements have been made.
- Medical Examiner-Coroner may be able to assist with decedent storage in exigent circumstances – see 3. below for ME-C DOC contact information

(See 1. & 2. below)

### Death Certificates

- In the case of a death due to COVID-19 in the healthcare setting, the treating physician should fill out the death certificate. Deaths due to COVID-19 should not be referred to the Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner unless there is a reason that would otherwise require the department's involvement. An example would be the unlikely case in which there was a reasonable suspicion that injury or intoxication also contributed to the death – see 3. & 4. below
- Consider utilizing a "Physician in Charge" concept if applicable for your facility, whereby one or more qualified physicians are assigned to sign death certificates for all positive or presumptive COVID-19 cases.
- The California system for electronic filing of death certificates, CA-EDRS, may be utilized – see pages 137-138 of the MFMG

### Reporting COVID-19 Associated Deaths

- COVID-19 associated deaths must be reported by healthcare providers immediately:

- by phoning 888-397-3993 or 213-240-7821 or
  - by completing the Novel Coronavirus Death Report form then sending via secure email to [COVIDdeath@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:COVIDdeath@ph.lacounty.gov). When completing the form, please make sure to fill in all sections including if the family has been informed.
- It is the responsibility of the reporting provider to ensure that the next of kin has been notified of the death and of the COVID-19 result. Including this information prevents DPH from having to contact providers for missing information.

### Additional Information

1. Occupational Health & Safety COVID-19 information (see Deathcare information) - <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>
2. California Department of Public Health (CDPH) All Facilities Letter “Guidance for Procedures and Transfer of Deceased Persons with Confirmed or Suspected Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)” dated March 16, 2020 - <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHCQ/LCP/Pages/AFL-20-24.aspx>
3. Medical Examiner-Coroner Department Operations Center (DOC) for COVID-19 email address - [meceoc@coroner.lacounty.gov](mailto:meceoc@coroner.lacounty.gov)
4. Guidance for Certifying Deaths Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID–19) April 2020 from the National Vital Statistics System, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/vsrg/vsrg03-508.pdf>
5. Also see hand out from California Department of Public Health (CDPH) titled GUIDANCE FOR CERTIFYING COVID-19 RELATED DEATHS IN CALIFORNIA dated March 6, 2020
6. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Funeral Services -
7. <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/GuidanceFuneralServices.pdf>
8. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Faith-Based Organizations - <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/GuidanceFaithBasedOrgsEnglish.pdf>
9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 information for healthcare professionals - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/>

### Resources

- HUB Group Incorporated have a few 53-foot refrigerated trailers that can be set from -10 to 65 degrees that they would like to donate. They are roadworthy, in working order and are located between Los Angeles and Oakland. Interested parties should contact Ivan at [izenovic@hubgroup.com](mailto:izenovic@hubgroup.com). (Only available to non-profit organizations)
- Cold Box Portable Storage – company that has refrigerated portable storage containers that can be used for decedent storage. Please check out the pricing options as may be more economical to buy if planning on renting for 3 months or longer. If interested contact Kevin McCurley at 562-472-1617 [kmccurley@cold-box.com](mailto:kmccurley@cold-box.com).
- PVC Tech Corp – plastic wrapping company in Dominguez Hills used by the ME-C. Contact number is 310-608-1115.

Note: Los Angeles County is not endorsing any company listed. The information is provided as a courtesy.