



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

ROBERT GORDON
DIRECTOR

March 9, 2020

Dear Medical Examiner and Funeral Director:

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is working closely with healthcare providers, local health departments, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to actively monitor and provide guidance for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Currently, there are no cases of COVID-19 in Michigan.

Understanding [how the virus that causes COVID-19 spreads](#) is largely based on what is known about the current situation and similar coronaviruses. COVID-19 is spread through:

- Close contact (within about six feet) with an infectious person, or
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- It also 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 eyes.

Handling human remains or performing postmortem procedures, poses a minimal risk for transmission. Postmortem activities should be conducted with a focus on avoiding aerosol generating procedures and ensuring that if aerosol generation is likely (e.g., when using an oscillating saw) that appropriate engineering controls and personal protective equipment (PPE) are used.

The CDC has published a thorough guidance document for medical examiners, pathologists and other workers involved in postmortem care of persons under investigation (PUI) for COVID-19. Recommendations for biosafety and infection control practices during specimen collection and handling including during autopsy procedures can be found in [Interim Guidance for Collection and Submission of Postmortem Specimens from Deceased Persons Under Investigation \(PUI\) for COVID-19, February 2020](#).

The CDC guidance should inform development of procedures for specimen collection and autopsies of decedents who were PUI for COVID-19. If an autopsy is performed, standard precautions, contact precautions and airborne precautions with eye protection should be followed during the procedure. In addition, if an urgent consult is required for a decedent who was a PUI for COVID-19, please contact the CDC's EOC at 770-488-7100.

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The National Center for Health Statistics is emphasizing that **Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID-19** should be reported on the death certificate for all decedents where the disease caused or is assumed to have caused or contributed to death. Specification of the causal pathway leading to death in Part I of the certificate is important. For example, in cases when COVID-19 causes pneumonia and fatal respiratory distress, both pneumonia and respiratory distress should be included along with COVID-19 in Part I. Certifiers should include as much detail as possible based on their knowledge of the case, medical records, laboratory testing, etc. If the decedent had other chronic conditions such as COPD or asthma that may have also contributed, these conditions should be reported in Part II.

MDHHS will provide updates when additional guidance becomes available. Medical Examiners and funeral directors are encouraged to monitor the MDHHS COVID-19 website at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus and the CDC COVID-19 website at CDC.gov/Coronavirus for information updates.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Community Health Emergency Coordination Center at checcdeptcoor@michigan.gov.

Sincerely,



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Chief Medical Executive
Chief Deputy Director for Health