



4/15/20

**COVID-19 Guidance for Deaths Occurring Outside of a Health Care Setting**

April 15, 2020

Dear Partners,

Thank you for all your help in taking care of the needs of our community. A situation came up recently with a death occurring outside of a health care setting. There was a concern that the deceased may have had COVID-19 disease. This generated a lot of calls to multiple individuals, and a lot of coordination. With assistance from the Hospice nurse and cooperation of the Funeral home, a test sample was obtained, and the sample was sent by the Health Department for testing.

This type of situation will likely arise again. My main concern is that a patient with COVID-19 potentially can expose family members, hospice staff, first responders in the process of active dying or when EMS is called in to respond.

As the number of cases continue to increase in our community, we are likely to have more unexpected encounters that might put your staff at increased risk if protective measures are not put in place. EMS has changed their policy to wearing PPE for all calls. I was informed that funeral homes are now applying a disinfectant on a towel over the face before they move and transport the deceased.

This policy and procedure is in place whenever we have a death occurring outside of a health care facility where COVID-19 exposures might occur to people who are not using adequate protection.

We do need the cooperation and collaboration of everyone involved.

- Our request is that the public health duty officer be informed whenever a suspect exposure occurs. This allows us to evaluate the situation and determine
  - if the deceased is truly a suspect for COVID-19 and,
  - if there were any exposures to the public.
- We will need the assistance of the funeral homes to obtain the test samples so Public Health can arrange for the testing to be done. The sample would need to be obtained before any disinfectant is placed over the face. When we receive the results, persons who are considered exposed individuals will be informed.
- We will need the Hospice providers to inform us if they have a concern that an actively dying patient might have COVID-19 like symptoms, preferably, before they pass away. This is especially critical if staff involved are not using proper distancing and infection control practices.
- We need the Coroner's office to let us know if COVID-19 is the suspected cause of death in a natural death.
- Refer to the most current CDC guidance for Collection and Submission of Postmortem Specimens from Deceased Persons with Known or Suspected COVID-19  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html>

Attached is the suggested procedure. Please give me feedback before I finalize it. I hope we never have to use this plan but we will have it in place in the event we need it. Please take care and stay safe. Stay 6 feet away from everyone. If you have to be closer than 6 feet, please protect yourself.

Respectfully,


Diana T. Yu, MD, MSPH  
Acting Health Officer, Thurston County

Gary Warnock  
Thurston County Coroner



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## DRAFT PROCEDURE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

 THURSTON COUNTY <i>Washington</i> Est. 1852  <b>PROCEDURE</b>	<b>Procedure Title</b> Handling Out of Hospital Deaths (Create title as a hyperlink to the most recent version)	
	<b>Procedure Number</b> [Follow County Standard tied to Policy #.]	<b>Effective Date</b> ##/##/####
	<b>Primary Policy Supported</b> 34-200POL (Create title as a hyperlink to most recent version)	<b>Latest Approval Date</b> 11/2019
	<b>Approved By</b> _____ [Type Name Here, Sign Above]	<b>Next Review Date</b> ##/##/####
<b>PROCEDURE INTENT</b>		
<b>Purpose</b>	To clarify the procedure followed by partners when an out of hospital death occurs and COVID-19 is suspected	
<b>Scope</b>	This procedure impacts Thurston County Public Health and Social Services DCP Division, Thurston County Coroner's Office and Thurston County Funeral Homes <input type="checkbox"/> Internal Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct Impact to Citizens	
<b>Are Office/Department Documents on this subject permitted?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, however Office/Department Documents must be consistent with this County-wide Document.	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>PROCEDURE PROCESSES AND ACTIONS</b>		
<b>1). The procedure followed when Emergency Medical Services staff, family members and/or hospice provider staff are concerned that a death, occurring outside of a health care facility, may be due to COVID-19 that includes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate notification of the out of hospital death to the Thurston County Coroner at 360-867-2140</li> <li>• Reporting the death to the Thurston County Coroner's Office via FAX 360-867-2141 by Hospice Provider staff the morning following the death</li> <li>• Contact of Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff at 360-490-8060 by external agencies to report the death and receive guidance</li> <li>• Assignment of one COVID-19 test kit to each local funeral home</li> <li>• Assignment of two COVID-19 test kits to the TC Coroner's office</li> <li>• Plan to replace used kits by Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department Disease Control and Prevention Staff.</li> </ul>		
<b>Action By</b>	<b>Action</b>	
EMS, Hospice Provider, Funeral Home staff's	1. Notifies Coroner's Office 360-867-2140 of death	
Hospice Provider staff	2. Reports the death to the Coroner's Office by FAX 360-867-2141 the morning following the death	
Thurston County Coroner's Office staff	1. Calls Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff at 360-490-8060 to report death.	

# PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

THURSTON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
 412 LILLY RD NE  
 OLYMPIA, WA, 98506-5132  
 DISEASE REPORTING: (360)786-5470 INFORMATION: (360) 867-2500  
 Diana Yu, MD, MSPH, Acting Health Officer



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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Provides On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff with information and circumstances of death including           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date and time of death</li> <li>• Deceased demographics</li> <li>• Illness history</li> <li>• Contacts in preceding week</li> <li>• Name and contact information for funeral home responsible for picking up and transporting the body.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Requests On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff provides assistance determining if deceased           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was tested for COVID-19</li> <li>• Had symptoms compatible with COVID-19</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Reports who was exposed to deceased in the week prior to death.</li> </ol>
Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contacts Thurston County Health Officer to discuss case and ask for guidance.</li> <li>2. Provides Health Officer with information about deceased and circumstances.</li> </ol>
Thurston County Health Officer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Determines if additional follow-up is necessary</li> <li>2. Directs Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff to contact and arrange testing through transporting funeral home.</li> </ol>
Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contacts funeral home or coroner's office staff transporting deceased and requests they:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect COVID-19 sample</li> <li>• Collect a nasopharyngeal specimen, as directed, before any disinfectant is placed on deceased</li> <li>• Label specimens (test kit) per directions and store in a secure refrigeration unit.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Funeral Home Staff or Coroner's Office Staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Notifies Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff when specimens have been collected</li> <li>2. Delivers specimen (test kits) to Public Health Staff</li> </ol>
Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department On-Call Disease Control and Prevention Staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Receives specimen (test kit) and any additional information from coroner's office or funeral home</li> <li>2. Replaces used test kit</li> <li>3. Enters specimen into DOH electronic specimen system</li> <li>4. Prepares and packages specimen as Group B specimen for transport to Washington Public Health Laboratory</li> <li>5. Ships specimen or arranges for staff to transport.</li> <li>6. Creates list of contacts to facilitate follow-up when test results are available</li> <li>7. Notifies contacts, completes case investigation if test is positive</li> <li>8. Enters information into WDRS if specimen is positive</li> </ol>

## DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

**COVID-19** 2019 Novel coronavirus disease

## OTHER SUPPORTING INFORMATION

**Communication and Implementation Strategy** Thurston County Health Officer and Thurston County Coroner will communicate process by letter or Public Health Alert to Thurston County Funeral Directors and Hospice Providers. Disease Control and Prevention

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	staff will arrange for distribution of test kits to Funeral Directors and Coroner's Office.
<b>Other related Policies, Standards, Procedures, Guideline, Forms, FAQs</b>	<p>CDC-Collection and Submission of Postmortem Specimens from Deceased Persons with Known or Suspected COVID-19  <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html</a></p> <p>DOH – Public Health Lab -  <a href="https://www.doh.wa.gov/ForPublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/PublicHealthLaboratories/MicrobiologyLabTestMenu">https://www.doh.wa.gov/ForPublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/PublicHealthLaboratories/MicrobiologyLabTestMenu</a></p>
<b>Superseded Documents</b>	[List titles and URLs (if available) of all procedures superseded by this Procedure. If none, insert 'N/A'.]

**PROCEDURE ADMINISTRATION**

<b>Procedure Owner</b>	Thurston County Health Officer
<b>Contact Person</b> (if different from above)	Thurston County Health Officer or Disease Control and Prevention Division Director

**REVISION HISTORY**

Effective Date	Approved By	Modifications
##/##/####	_____ Name/Title	Procedure Created
##/##/####	_____ Name/Title	[Indicate what changed]
##/##/####	_____ Name/Title	[Indicate what changed]
<b>Reviewers of the Current Revision</b>	_____ Name/Title	_____ Name/Title
	_____ Name/Title	_____ Name/Title
	_____ Name/Title	_____ Name/Title

**FURTHER INFORMATION**  
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<b>Keywords for search engine</b>	COVID-19, Deaths, Coroner, Funeral
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