Management of deaths due to COVID-19 – Information for funeral directors

9 June 2020

The risk of transmission of COVID-19 from handling the body of a deceased person is low.

Only registered funeral directors can lawfully handle, store and transport deceased persons.

Funeral workers should always use routine body handling and infection control precautions when handling any deceased bodies. Handling of bodies, including transportation and disposal, should occur in line with the relevant legislation. When transporting the deceased, the body must be placed and secured in a leak-proof body bag to prevent leakage of body fluids.

Funeral industry personnel should undertake their standard infection control and occupational health and safety guidelines when handling and preparing bodies. After use, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be carefully removed and decontaminated or disposed of as clinical waste as soon as practicable.

A deceased patient known or suspected to have COVID-19 can be embalmed, cremated or buried. Personal protective equipment must be worn and standard infection control and occupational health and safety guidelines should be followed at all times while handling and preparing the body.

Completing Death Documentation

Funeral directors are encouraged to promote the use of online Death Documents to health care workers. This avoids practitioners, mortuary staff and funeral directors having to have face-to-face interactions where practical during Alert Level 1.

Assistance for practitioners to register to use Death Documents online is available on the MoH website at health.govt.nz/our-work/regulation-health-and-disability-system/burial-and-cremation-act-1964/death-documents-project/roll-out-resources

Having a RealMe login is an essential starting point for registering to use Death Documents online. The RealMe Helpline is available for assistance 0800 664 774. Most new users don’t experience any problems in registering and using the system. The Ministry of Health Contact Centre provides support to Death Documents users. They can be contacted on 0800 505 125 or customerservice@moh.govt.nz

Further information

This advice should be read in conjunction with: