

## **Tutorial 2 -Inquest, Disposal of the Body, PM Changes, Identification**

**Batch 29**

**Date : 15/01/2021**

**Please bring your answers to the tutorial.**

Several dead bodies were brought to the NCTH following a riot by prisoners from the Mahara prison. PCR test was performed before the autopsies and test was positive in some of the cases. Documents related to the identification of prisoners were burnt during the incident.

- 1.1 State the procedure for identification of these dead bodies.
- 1.2 Explain the procedure to follow regarding the inquest when the dead bodies were brought to the hospital in this incident.
- 1.3 There was a delay in identification of a Covid negative dead body and moderate decomposition changes were observed during the autopsy. State the likely changes which were observed during the autopsy due to decomposition.
- 1.4 Explain the inquest procedure and disposal of dead bodies in current situation in Sri Lanka.

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Ministry of Health & Indigenous Medical Services

All Provincial Director and Regional Directors of Health Services  
All Heads of Institutions

**RE: AUTOPSY PRACTICE AND DISPOSAL OF DEAD BODY DUE TO COVID-19**  
**(Version date 31.03.2020)**

This circular is to provide a standard guidance on autopsy and disposal of all COVID-19 related deaths.

COVID-19 related deaths could be categorized arbitrarily into 4 groups;

**Category I**

Death following **confirmed** Corona Viral Infection (COVID-19)

• Method of disposal

- An inquest is not required.
- Minimum handling.
- Viewing of the body only by close relative/s is allowed in a pre-designated area in hospital.
- No embalming/No autopsy (medico-legal or pathological). The body cannot be taken home.
- Place the body in a body bag and seal.
- Body should not be viewed after sealing.
- Funeral undertaker should place sealed body bag in a coffin for transportation (coffin should be preferably sealed)
- The body **should be cremated within 24 hours** (preferably within 12 hours).

**In case of death occurring in the ward /ICU /ETU;**

- Only use designated body bags or a suitable alternative.
- The dead body should be handled by the attending staff and put in the body bag and kept in a pre-designated place.

- If the death occurred in ICU, the body should be removed from the machines and placed in a pre-designated area.

**Supervision of disposal should be done by MOH/ PHI along with area police.**

**Category II**

Death following suspected Corona Viral Infection (awaiting laboratory confirmation)

- Method of disposal
  - An inquest may be required.
  - Minimum handling.
  - External examination only.
  - Nasal swab, throat swabs, tracheal aspirate and femoral blood sample (centrifuged) to be collected to be sent for analysis.
  - Viewing of the body only by close relative/s is allowed in a pre-designated area in hospital.
  - Place the body in a body bag and seal after external examination.
  - Body should not be viewed after sealing.
  - No embalming. The body cannot be taken home.
  - Funeral undertaker should place sealed body bag in a coffin for transportation (coffin should be preferably sealed).
  - The body should be cremated within 24 hours.
  - Clinicians and JMO should try to trace the report as early as possible;
    - If COVID-19 become positive: **should be cremated as in category- I**
    - If COVID- 19 is excluded: to handle as category IV
    - If the report is not available within 24 hours: cremation.

**In case of death occurring in the ward /ICU /ETU;**

- Only use designated body bags or a suitable alternative.
- The dead body should be handled by the attending staff and put in the body bag and kept in a pre-designated place.
- If the death occurred in ICU, the body should be removed from the machines and placed in a pre-designated area.

**Supervision of disposal of the body should be done by MOH/ PHI along with area police.**

**Category III**

Death following possible Corona Viral Infection with suggestive history and clinical findings.

- Method of disposal
  - An inquest may be required.
  - Minimum handling.
  - External examination only.
  - Nasal swab, throat swabs, tracheal aspirate and femoral blood sample (centrifuged) to be collected to be sent for analysis.
  - Viewing of the body only by close relative/s is allowed in a pre-designated area in hospital.
  - Place the body in a body bag and seal after external examination.

- Body should not be viewed after sealing.
- No embalming. The body cannot be taken home.
- Funeral undertaker should place sealed body bag in a coffin for transportation (coffin should be preferably sealed).
- The body should be cremated within 24 hours.
- JMO should try to trace the report as early as possible;
  - If COVID-19 become positive: should be handled as category I
  - If COVID- 19 is excluded: to handle as category IV
  - If the report is not available within 24 hours: cremation

**In case of death occurring in the ward /ICU /ETU;**

- Only use designated body bags or a suitable alternative.
- The dead body should be handled by the attending staff and put in the body bag and kept in a pre-designated place.
- If the death occurred in ICU, the body should be removed from the machines and placed in a pre-designated area.

**Supervision of disposal of the body should be done by MOH/ PHI along with area police.**

**Category IV**

Death due to pneumonia unlikely to be due to corona viral infection

- Method of disposal.
  - An inquest may be required. Better not to open all body cavities.
  - Nasal swab, throat swabs, tracheal aspirate and femoral blood sample (centrifuge) to be collected to be sent for analysis.
  - If necessary, perform a true cut lung biopsy.

**Routine disposal can be recommended (this has to be dealt on case by case basis by JMO).**

**DEATH OF FOREIGN NATIONALS following diagnosed Corona Viral Infection.**

- Disposal is same as category- I.
- The hospital authority should inform the Ministry of Health officials to contact the relevant embassy for the cremation in Sri Lanka.

**DEATH OF FOREIGN NATIONALS due to other unnatural causes (e.g. RTA) with possible exposure to COVID-19.**

- Disposal same as category II/category III However, an inquest is required. (An external examination or a limited autopsy may be performed).
- Hospital authority should inform the Ministry of Health officials to contact the relevant embassy for the cremation in Sri Lanka.

In case of any **suspected criminality** of COVID-19 infected patient under category I, II or III – An inquest is required. A partial or full autopsy may have to be performed with necessary IPC on a case by case basis by Consultant JMO.

Sample dispatch to designated laboratory - Please refer to Chapter 3 and annexure 1.


**Supervision of disposal should be done by MOH/ PHI along with area police.**

The post mortem handling **should be done by the senior-most JMO** with the senior morgue attendants in category I, II or III.

**In category I, II and III**

- **The body should never be washed under any circumstance.**
- **The body has to be placed in a sealed body bag and a coffin.**
- **Exclusive cremation.**
- **The disposal of bodies must be monitored by police, MOH and PHI.**

This is applicable to all institutions and relevant organizations concerned.

  
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DDC - National Hospital of Sri Lanka  
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 All Provincial Directors of Health Services  
 All Directors of Teaching Hospitals and General Hospitals  
 All Medical Superintendents of Base Hospitals  
 All Heads of Institutions, Ministry of Health

**Guidelines on management of dead during current pandemic of COVID - 19**

**1. If a death has occurred in a lockdown or high-risk area (Not in a health care institution).**

**1.1 Performing PCR for COVID-19 is a mandatory requirement.**

An inquest is mandatory by Inquirer into Sudden death (ISD) or Magistrate depending on the circumstances according to criminal procedure code (CPC).

A nasal/ throat swab for PCR has to be obtained by MOH/ PH: designated health care worker under supervision of MOH of the area. Once the sample for PCR had been obtained at the scene the dead body shall be placed into a body bag under supervision of investigating police officer. The dead body and body bag need to be treated with a disinfectant. Police shall make arrangements to dispatch the dead body to the area JMO with the sample obtained for PCR according to guideline. **Once the dead body is dispatched to the office of the JMO/designated place for storage, the scene shall be disinfected according to respective guidelines.**

1.2 In a case where field PCR is not feasible, the dead body needs to be placed in a body bag under the supervision of investigating police officer. (Police shall make arrangements to transport the dead body) to the office of the area JMO. The dead body should not be treated with any disinfectant. Once the dead body is dispatched, scene shall be treated with disinfectant according to guidelines. Once the dead body reaches the office of the JMO with request for postmortem examination and PCR, the JMO/MO (Medico-legal) or designated medical officer shall obtain necessary samples for COVID-19 PCR and place the dead body in the refrigerator.

**2. If death has occurred during the period of quarantine (in Quarantine center or at home – But not in a health care institution).**

**2.1 Performing PCR for COVID-19 is a mandatory requirement.**

An inquest is mandatory by Inquirer into Sudden death (ISD) or Magistrate depending on the circumstances according to criminal procedure code (CPC).

A nasal/ throat swab for PCR has to be obtained by MOH/ PHI designated health care worker under supervision of MOH of the area. Once the sample for PCR had been obtained, the dead body shall be placed into a body bag under supervision of investigating police officer. The dead body and body bag need to be treated with a disinfectant. Police shall make arrangements to dispatch the dead body to the area JMO with the sample obtained for PCR according to guideline. Once the dead body is dispatched to the office of the JMO/designated place for storage, the scene shall be disinfected according to respective guidelines.

**2.2 In a case where PCR at the scene is not feasible, the dead body needs to be placed in a body bag under the supervision of investigating police officer. Police shall make arrangements to transport the dead body to the office of the area JMO. The dead body should not be treated with any disinfectant. Once the dead body is dispatched, scene shall be treated with disinfectant according to guidelines. Once the dead body reaches the office of the JMO with request for postmortem examination and PCR, the JMO/MD (Medico-legal) or designated medical officer shall obtain necessary samples for COVID-19 PCR and place the dead body in the refrigerator.**

**3. If a death has occurred elsewhere other than above two instances (not in a health care institution).**

**3.1 An inquest is not mandatory for epidemiological purpose of prevention of COVID-19. However, irrespective of an inquest, a clearance certificate regarding COVID -19 from MOH/PHI should be obtained before the body being disposed.**

if the MOH/PHI/health care worker is of the view that the deceased need to be subjected to a PCR test for COVID-19, an inquest is recommended.

**In such instances sample can be obtained as follows,**

Nasal/ throat swab for PCR has to be obtained by MOH/ PHI designated health care worker under supervision of MOH of the area. Once the sample for PCR had been obtained, the dead body shall be placed into a body bag under supervision of investigating police officer. The dead body and body bag need to be treated with a disinfectant. Police shall make arrangements to dispatch the dead body to the area JMO with the sample obtained for PCR according to guideline. Once the dead body is dispatched to the office of the JMO/designated place for storage, the scene shall be disinfected according to respective guidelines.

3.2 In a case where PCR at the scene is not feasible, the dead body needs to be placed in a body bag under supervision of the investigating police officer. Police shall make arrangements to transport the dead body to the office of the area JMO. The dead body should not be treated with any disinfectant. Once the dead body is dispatched, scene shall be treated with disinfectant according to guidelines. Once the dead body will reach the office of the JMO with request for postmortem examination, obtaining PCR for COVID-19 is at the discretion of the JMO considering the recommendations of MOH/ PHE of the area.

4. If a death has occurred in a health care institution.

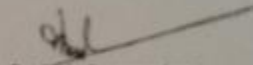
4.1 The clinicians shall decide on investigation for PCR for COVID-19.

Nasal/ throat swab for PCR can be obtained by the ward staff. Once the sample for PCR had been obtained in the ward, the dead body needs to be placed in a body bag under the supervision of nursing in-charge of the unit (according to current guidelines). The dead body and body bag need to be treated with a disinfectant. Once the body is dispatched to the designated place for storage, the ward shall be disinfected according to respective guidelines.

If an inquest and/or post mortem is needed,

Nasal/ throat swab for PCR can be obtained by ward staff. If the sample for PCR had been obtained in the ward, the dead body shall be placed into a body bag under supervision of nursing officer in-charge. The dead body and body bag need to be treated with a disinfectant. The dead body is dispatch to the office of the JMO with the sample obtained for PCR according to guideline. Once the dead body is dispatched to the office of the JMO, the ward shall be disinfected according to respective guidelines.

4.2 In a case where PCR at the hospital is not feasible the dead body needs to be placed in a body bag under supervision of nurse in-charge of the unit (according to current guidelines) and dispatched to the office of the JMO. The dead body should not be treated with any disinfectant. Once the dead body is dispatched, the ward shall be treated with disinfectant according to guidelines. Once the dead body reaches the office of the JMO with request for postmortem examination and PCR, the JMO shall obtain necessary samples for COVID-19 PCR and place the body in the refrigerator.

  
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