



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

February 3, 2020

DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

No. 2020 - 0067

TO: ALL UNDERSECRETARIES AND ASSISTANT SECRETARIES; DIRECTORS OF BUREAUS AND CENTERS FOR HEALTH DEVELOPMENT; MINISTER OF HEALTH – BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO; EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF SPECIALTY HOSPITALS AND NATIONAL NUTRITION COUNCIL; CHIEFS OF MEDICAL CENTERS, HOSPITALS, SANITARIA AND INSTITUTES; PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINE HEALTH INSURANCE CORPORATION; DIRECTORS OF PHILIPPINE NATIONAL AIDS COUNCIL AND TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION CENTERS AND OTHERS CONCERNED

SUBJECT: Guidelines on the Disposal and Shipment of the Remains of Confirmed Cases of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Acute Respiratory Disease (2019-nCoV ARD)

I. BACKGROUND

After a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown etiology was reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China last December 31, 2019, Chinese health authorities preliminarily identified the cause of this viral pneumonia as a new or novel type of coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

With an increasing number of cases spreading to various territories and confirmed human-to-human transmission, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) last January 30, 2020.

The Department of Health hereby issues these interim guidelines to public and private health facilities on the disposal and/or shipment of remains of confirmed 2019-nCoV ARD mortalities. These guidelines are in accordance with the Code on Sanitation of the Philippines (P.D. No. 856) and the Quarantine Law (R. A. No. 9271).

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of these guidelines, the following definitions are hereby adopted:

1. **Burial** - refers to the internment of remains in a grave, tomb or the sea;
2. **Cremains** - refers to the cinerary remains or the ashes resulting from the cremation of a dead body;
3. **Cremation** - refers to the process that reduces human remains to bone fragments of fine sand or ashes through combustion and dehydration;
4. **Crematorium** - refers to any designated place duly authorized by law to cremate dead persons;

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5. **Morgue** - refers to a place in which dead bodies are temporarily kept pending identification or burial;
6. **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** - refers to the materials used to cover the human body or any part of the human body in order to prevent contamination from the disease. This includes facial mask, eye protectors or goggles, gown, gloves, etc;
7. **Remains** - refers to the body or parts of the body of a dead person including the cremated remains.

III. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- A. All personnel handling the cadaver shall wear appropriate PPEs while performing their tasks. All PPEs shall be disposed of after its use.
- B. Burial, preferably cremation, shall be done within 12 hours after death. However, burial of the dead body shall, to the most possible extent, be in accordance with the person's religion or customs.
- C. Information on crematoriums and mortuaries contracted for cremation or burial of the remains shall be kept strictly confidential.
- D. Deaths of foreign nationals shall be immediately reported to the Bureau of International Health Cooperation (BIHC). The BIHC shall then inform the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) which shall thereafter notify the concerned embassy.
- E. Shipment of cremains of foreign nationals shall strictly adhere to the guidelines of the Bureau of Quarantine (BOQ). (See *Annex A*.)

IV. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

- A. **Removal of the Body from the Isolation Area and Transport to Cemetery or Crematorium**
 1. Transfer the body to the mortuary as soon as possible after death.
 2. Wrap the body with cloth and place in the airtight cadaver bag that is leak-proof and shall be zipped or closed tightly with tapes and bandage strips.
 3. Decontaminate surface of the bag with hypochlorite solution (50-100 ppm) or any hospital approved disinfectant.
 4. Ensure that the body is fully sealed in an impermeable airtight cadaver bag before being removed from the isolation room or area, and before transfer to the pathology department or the mortuary, to avoid leakage of body fluid.
 5. When properly packed in the airtight cadaver bag, the body can be safely removed for storage in the mortuary, sent to the crematorium, or placed in a coffin for burial.
 6. At no instance shall unzipping the cadaver bag of the body and removal of the body be permitted.
 7. The funeral establishment shall provide the transport of the cadaver to the burial site/crematorium. The vehicle shall be disinfected immediately after the cadaver has been removed.

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B. Coordination with Embassies (for non-residents)

1. Health facility, through the BIHC, shall notify the consular post immediately of the death of their national, and provide the opportunity to determine the proper manner of burial in accordance with the deceased's religion/custom.
2. In case communication with the foreigner's consulate office and/or next of kin is delayed or remains unavailable after reasonable efforts have been exerted, the burial of the deceased foreigner shall proceed and shall not exceed 12 hours.
3. The Embassy shall pay the burial/cremation services. Due to urgency, the DOH may shoulder the expenses and reimbursement shall be processed subject to accounting and auditing rules and regulations.

C. Requirements for Burial/Cremation

1. The attending physician shall:
 - a. issue the death certificate;
 - b. report the death to the City/Municipal Health Office (CHO/MHO) within 48 hours after the death; and
 - c. forward to the local civil registrar concerned within 30 days after death for registration.
2. The health facility shall accomplish all documentary requirements related to burial/cremation in coordination with the CHO/MHO.
3. No burial/cremation shall take place without a validly issued death certificate.

D. Procedures for Burial and Cremation

1. Ensure minimal handling of the body.
 - a. If the person died outside of a health facility, universal precautionary measures shall be applied by the mortuary or funeral establishment.
 - b. If the person died inside a health facility, tagging shall be done by the local health officer or attending physician, and universal precautionary measures shall be applied.
2. Hygienic preparation, such as cleaning of the body, tidying of hair, trimming of nails and shaving, and embalming of the remains shall not be allowed.
3. For those that will be buried:
 - a. Only adult members of the family of the deceased may be permitted to attend the funeral.
 - b. Remains shall be placed in a durable, airtight and sealed metal casket.
 - c. Remains shall not be taken to any place of public assembly. Viewing of the deceased shall not be permitted.
4. For those that will be cremated:
 - a. Cremains shall be reduced to the size of a fine sand or ashes and packed in a cremains container before they are turned over to the relatives of the deceased.
 - b. Cremains shall be placed in a container with a minimum capacity of 0.0049 cubic meter and made of polyethylene provided with a liner bag (preformed 5 mil plastic), locking tie, and identification label.
5. Public and private cemeteries or private burial grounds shall be designated for the disposal of body/cremains. Where relatives of the deceased so wish, cremains shall be allowed to be brought home only in the prescribed container.

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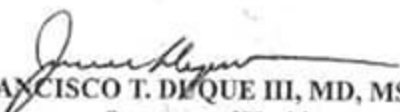
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E. Shipment of the Cremains

1. The DFA and BIHC shall jointly obtain the Transfer Permit, to be issued by the Bureau of Quarantine (BOQ).
2. Shipment of cremains abroad shall be governed by existing regulations of the BOQ. Transport to foreign ports shall require a Quarantine Permit from the BOQ before shipment

For strict compliance of all concerned.


FRANCISCO T. DE QUE III, MD, MSc
Secretary of Health

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