



From The NC Board of Funeral Service.....

As the Coronavirus continues to spread across the United States, it has direct and immediate impact on North Carolina. With regard to the practice of funeral service, the NC Board of Funeral Service will send you regular updates on the crisis as more information is announced at both the state and federal levels.

As an important first step, please visit the Board website at www.ncbfs.org for links to current, critical sources of information regarding the virus and its impact on our state and profession.

UPDATE TO LICENSEES: Executive Order FAQ; CDC Updated Guidelines *March 19, 2020*

Governor Cooper's Briefing

Governor Cooper held a briefing today at 1:00 pm to discuss continuing responses regarding the coronavirus and COVID-19 infection. Much of the briefing centered on waivers from a number of health and human services, public education and small business rules to offer immediate assistance to citizens and business owners. The Governor announced the first documented case of community spread of the virus in North Carolina, and he discussed changes in the unemployment insurance system to expedite unemployment benefit payments to those who have lost their jobs as a result of the virus containment efforts.

The Board reached out to the Governor's Office this morning to assure an understanding and awareness of the implications of the virus and subsequent containment restrictions on funeral homes, licensees, and families. We conveyed the concerns that licensees face daily in helping families plan meaningful services within the restrictions expressed in Executive Order 117, and we shared the numerous ways that many of you are responding to these restrictions while still supporting and reassuring families as they plan services for family members who have died. We alerted the Governor's Office to the continuous risks licensees encounter through services, visitations, and other events as well as the close contact with family members during arrangement conferences. The Governor's executive staff expressed appreciation for your work and service to families as they deal with the death of a loved one.

April Board Meeting

The Board has announced that the meeting scheduled for April 15, 2020, will be conducted by teleconference to avoid as much as possible the risks associated with public gatherings. Those wishing to attend the meeting by teleconference may do so by calling in to the Board's Teleconference Center. The call – in number and passcode will be posted on the Board's web homepage at www.ncbfs.org along with the meeting agenda.

Frequently Asked Questions Concerning Executive Order 117

The Board has provided extensive information since Monday regarding the restrictions on public gatherings, and we have obtained an FAQ from the Governor's Office which we are sharing below to provide additional clarification and explanation.

During a state of emergency, the Governor has the constitutional authority to perform and exercise functions, powers, and duties as are necessary to promote and secure the safety and protection of the civilian population. This FAQ provides guidance for the implementation of Executive Order No. 117 ("Order") Individuals should check with local governments to determine whether additional restrictions have been imposed in local jurisdictions to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Section 1(a) of the Order defines mass gathering "as any event or convening that brings together more than one hundred (100) persons in a single room or single space at the same time, such as an auditorium, stadium, arena, large conference room, meeting hall, theater, or any other confined indoor or outdoor space." Section 1(a) is directed at organized events or a convening in a single space or single room.

Section 1(b) of the Order states "mass gathering does not include normal operations at airports, bus and train stations, medical facilities, libraries, shopping malls and centers, or other spaces where more than one hundred (100) persons may be gathered. It also does not include office environments, schools, restaurants, factories, grocery stores or other retail establishments."

Section 1(b) addresses situations where, under normal operating conditions, more than one hundred (100) people may be in the same location but not at a coordinated event or convening. School closure is addressed in Section 2 of the Order. Section 3 of the Order urges people to maintain social distancing recommendations of approximately 6 feet from other people whenever possible. People should continue to wash hands, utilize hand sanitizers and practice proper respiratory etiquette. These actions will limit the spread of COVID-19.

1) Does the Order apply to churches? If a church gathering has a coordinated event or convening for more than 100, such gathering would be prohibited under Section 1(a). If a church has more than 100 employees and they come to work, that would fall within the exemption of Section 1(b) because it functions as an office environment.

2) Does the Order apply to wedding ceremonies or receptions? If a wedding ceremony or reception has more than 100 attendees, that activity would be prohibited under Section 1(a).

3) Does the Order apply to funeral homes and funerals? A funeral home can continue to conduct retail business in assisting clients with funeral arrangements. However, a funeral that has more than 100 attendees would be prohibited under Section 1(a).

4) Are schools closed to students and staff or just students? Section 2 of the Order directs that "all public schools close for students effective Monday, March 16, 2020 until March 30, 2020, unless extended beyond that date." This language contemplates that public school facilities be closed as instructional settings for K-12 students. Local school districts may continue to utilize facilities for other purposes as identified by local boards of education and school leaders. However, usage must be consistent with other aspects of the Order,

including the provisions prohibiting mass gatherings of more than 100 individuals, and potential guidance from local boards of health and emergency management officials.

5) Are school districts required to offer distance learning during this period of closure? During this closure period, local boards of education and school leaders should create a plan for remote or distance learning opportunities in the event that a longer period of school closure is needed. The Order, however, does not mandate remote or distance learning opportunities for students be offered between March 16 to March 30. Local boards of education and school leaders may provide remote or distance learning opportunities for students if they are able. Local boards of education and school leaders should continue current virtual learning opportunities.

6) What public schools are covered by the Order? Section 2 of the Order applies to all “public school units” as defined in N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C5. This Order does not apply to schools operated by the US Department of Defense, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS), and the NC Department of Public Safety (NC DPS). Given unique facility needs, NC DHHS and NC DPS may make decisions around operations for schools operated by those agencies. Public schools that offer primarily virtual instruction to students (e.g. NC Virtual Public School and virtual charter schools) may continue to provide instruction virtually to students. However, any in-person interactions with students are subject to Section 1(a).

7) Are child care facilities closed? The Order does not require child care facilities to close. However, child care facilities are subject to the Order Section 1(a), and shall not convene more than 100 people in a single room or single space at the same time.

8) Do private schools have to close? The Order does not require private schools to close. However, private schools shall not convene a gathering of more than 100 people in a single room or single space at the same time as they are subject to Section 1(a).

9) Does the Order to apply to movie theaters? A movie theater is subject to the Order. A movie theater may operate so long as it caps attendance so that no more than 100 persons are in a single room or single space at the same time. In addition, proper social distancing guidelines outlined in Section 3 of the Order should be followed.

10) Can a local gym offer a “school’s out camp” for the next two weeks? Any such camp may be subject to child care licensure laws, and also could not gather more than 100 people in a single room or a single space at the same time.

11) Can County/City governments set up “day camps” through their parks and recreations departments if less than 100 attendees attend to care for essential personnel’s children so that essential personnel will report to work? Recreational camps meeting current statutory and licensure requirements are allowed, however, they may not gather more than 100 people in a single room or single space at the same time.

12) Can the Order be utilized to mandate essential personnel to report to duty? The Order addresses the State’s authority to address a serious or significant public health issue.

13) Will my gym be open? Please contact your gym for information. However, a gym may not gather more than 100 people in a single room or single space at the same time and should follow the social distancing guidelines.

14) **Will the State Farmer’s Market be open?** The State Farmer’s Market may continue normal operations as a retail establishment. However, it is subject to Section 1(a) of the Order and may not convene a group of more than 100 people in the same room or same space at the same time.

15) **How will the Order be enforced?** Appropriate local law enforcement agencies and district attorneys are generally responsible for enforcement of the Order provisions.

Updated Decedent Care (based upon CDC guidance as of March 18, 2020)

Funeral home workers should follow their routine infection prevention and control precautions when handling a decedent who died of COVID-19. If it is necessary to transfer a body to a bag, follow Standard Precautions, including additional personal protective equipment (PPE) if splashing of fluids is expected.

Transporting a Body

For transporting a body after the body has been bagged, disinfect the outside of the bag with an EPA-registered disinfectant labeled for emerging viral pathogens expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). Wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling the body bag.

Embalming

Embalming can be conducted. During embalming, follow Standard Precautions including the use of additional PPE if splashing is expected (e.g. disposable gown, face shield or goggles and facemask). Wear heavy-duty gloves over nitrile disposable gloves if there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds, or other injuries that break the skin.

Prep Room Cleaning

Cleaning should be conducted in accordance with manufacturer’s instructions. EPA-registered products labeled for emerging viral pathogens are expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

Hand Hygiene

After cleaning and removal of PPE, perform hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water is not available. Soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled.

Updated Decedent Care (based upon CDC guidance as of March 18, 2020)

Disposition

Decedents with COVID-19 can be buried or cremated, but check for any additional state and local requirements that may dictate the handling and disposition of the remains of individuals who have died of certain infectious diseases.

Return of Remains from Overseas

CDC does not require an autopsy before the remains of a person who died overseas are returned to the United States. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the death, some countries may require an autopsy.

Sources of support to the family include the local consulate or embassy, travel insurance provider, tour operator, faith-based and aid organizations, and the deceased's employer. There likely will need to be an official identification of the body and official documents issued by the consular office.

CDC requirements for importing human remains depend upon if the body has been embalmed, cremated, or if the person died from a quarantinable communicable disease. At this time, COVID-19 is a quarantinable communicable disease in the United States and the remains must meet the standards for importation found in 42 Code of Federal Regulations Part 71.55 and may be cleared, released, and authorized for entry into the United States only under the following conditions:

- The remains are cremated, or
- The remains are properly embalmed and placed in a hermetically sealed casket, or
- The remains are accompanied by a permit issued by the CDC Director. The CDC permit (if applicable) must accompany the human remains at all times during shipment.

Permits for the importation of the remains of a person known or suspected to have died from a quarantinable communicable disease may be obtained through the CDC Division of Global Migration and Quarantine by calling the CDC Emergency Operations Center at 770-488-7100 or emailing dgmqpolicyoffice@cdc.gov.

Please see CDC's guidance for additional information. You will also need to check with your airline carriers as they may have additional limitations in place.

Funeral or Visitation Service

A funeral or visitation service can be held for a person who has died of COVID-19. There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19.

Best Practice: Consider investing in a lace veil for immediate services where casket is open or family wishes to view.

Updated Decedent Care (based upon CDC guidance as of March 18, 2020)

Touching a COVID-19 Decedent

COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning how it spreads. The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to mainly spread from close contact (i.e., within about 6 feet) with a person who is currently sick with COVID-19. The virus likely spreads primarily through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory infections spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. This type of spread is not a concern after death. However, CDC recommends that people should consider not touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19.

Best Practice: Consider investing in a lace veil for immediate services where casket is open or family wishes to view.

Spread of COVID-19

There may be less of a chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging after the body has been prepared for viewing. Other activities, such as kissing, washing, and shrouding should be avoided before, during, and after the body has been prepared, if possible.

Cultural, Ritualistic or Religious Practices

If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible. At a minimum, people conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required (such as disposable gown, face shield or goggles and facemask).

Touching Surfaces

It 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 possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.
