



**Mandy Cohen, MD, MPH**  
*Secretary*

**Mark T. Benton**  
*Assistant Secretary, Division of Public Health*

**Michelle Aurelius, MD**  
*Chief Medical Examiner*

To: North Carolina Board of Funeral Services, North Carolina Medical Examiners  
From: Michelle Aurelius, MD, Chief Medical Examiner  
Date: April 2, 2020  
Subject: Guidance for Cremation Authorization in Suspected COVID-19 Cases

Cremation authorizations are still required per North Carolina General Statute and North Carolina Administrative Code. Cremation authorizations are important to ensure that a North Carolina medical examiner has inquired into the cause and manner of death and has the opinion that no further examination into a decedent's cause and manner of death is necessary. The medical examiner's report is captured on DHHS Form 1181, which requires a medical examiner to certify that he or she has viewed the body of the decedent as part of their pre-cremation investigation.

Because of the concerns associated with handling decedents previously identified in my memorandum of March 23, 2020 "Infection Prevention for Handling Decedents with COVID-19" and to maximize preventing contact with infectious body fluids, infectious aerosols, and other hazards, I am temporarily amending the guidance for conducting cremation authorizations in suspected COVID-19 cases.

Specifically, during the declared State of Emergency under North Carolina Executive Order 116, when performing a cremation authorization for a case where the death certificate includes **the mention of COVID-19, coronavirus**, or any other identifier of COVID-19 as outlined in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner's memorandum of March 30, 2020 "Guidance for certification of death involving COVID-19", it is permissible for North Carolina medical examiners to complete a cremation authorization **without viewing the decedent's body** and only review the death certificate or any other pertinent information to ensure that medical examiner jurisdiction is not necessary.

The following notation will be required to be added below the medical examiner's signature on the cremation authorization form and in the Report of Medical Examiner Investigation (RIME):

"The death certificate includes the mention of COVID-19, coronavirus, or some identifier of COVID-19. Thus, under the guidance of the Chief Medical Examiner during the declared State of Emergency under Executive Order 116, I did not view the decedent." An example of this phrase insertion is attached.

This relaxed requirement will remain in effect until the declared State of Emergency under Executive Order 116 is terminated.

As we learn more about the coronavirus and new treatments and prevention strategies occur, this may be revised in the future. We are working to ensure the safety of you, funeral service providers, and the community while supporting your continued expert professional evaluations and authorizations.

**Resources:**

- NC OCME Memo "Infection Prevention for Handling Decedents with COVID-19" of March 23, 2020
- NC OCME Memo "Guidance for certification of death involving COVID-19" memo of March 30, 2020