



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.

Removal and Transportation of Decedents

In recent days, major print and visual media outlets have reported that significant increases in the numbers of deaths from the Coronavirus are expected in the next few weeks. In response, it was reported earlier this week that The Pentagon is prepared to provide up to 100,000 human remains pouches for the transportation and storage of decedents, and FEMA has confirmed that it is undertaking "prudent planning" including preparations for "mortuary contingencies."

In North Carolina, the Board made available in February CDC guidelines for handling human remains where death may have been the result of COVID-19 infection. We subsequently posted guidance from the NC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner regarding infection prevention and control. The Board strongly urges licensees and transporters to review these guidelines on the website to minimize any risk of exposure or spread of the virus to the extent possible.

Those transporters who have been issued a Removal and Transportation Permit by the Board have received a survey from the NC Division of Public Health/Office of Epidemiology. If you have not yet responded to the survey, we encourage your cooperation so that their emergency preparedness and response teams will have key information available to them regarding the transfer of human remains. Other public health organizations may also contact Removal and Transportation permit holders as they develop contact information and other resources they will need in preparing for the possibility of increased numbers of COVID-19 deaths in North Carolina.

The Board's Compliance Officer, Brett Lisenbee, joined a conference call this afternoon with representatives from the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team [DMORT] and the NC Division of Health and Human Services/Public Health Preparedness and Response Branch. The Preparedness Team in association with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and the NC Emergency Response Operations Team encourages that removals of decedents be as timely as possible once a call has been received.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recommends the following:

- When making a removal at a hospital, nursing home or other healthcare facility, follow Standard Precautions when making a transfer from any facility. When the healthcare facility

contacts you about making a removal, ask whether there are any precautions, guidelines or procedures you need to follow when you arrive.

- When making a removal in a home: If you know the decedent died of a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, any staff entering the home should don a face mask and proper PPE.
- Regardless of the location of the removal, you may wish to let the family know that, for your protection and theirs during this pandemic, you and your staff will be wearing appropriate personal protective equipment. Families will then be aware of what to expect when you arrive.

We encourage you to review the CDC guidelines that are accessible through the link posted on our website under **Message From The Board**. You'll see the link to the CDC. When you click on it, you will then click on the option for Healthcare Professionals on their homepage.

Personal Protective Equipment [PPE]

We have heard from John Harris, President of the Funeral Directors and Morticians Association [FDMANC] of concerns regarding the supply and accessibility to personal protective equipment. Mr. Harris has relayed that the national FDMANC has urged appropriate federal agencies and authorities to recognize funeral service as an Essential Business in any federal-level declaration of mandatory business closures. We also understand that Mr. Harris has discussed this issue with the President of the NC Funeral Directors Association, Gary Overcash, to encourage collaboration between the two Associations.

If deemed an Essential Business critical to the nation's infrastructure, funeral service professionals would have priority access to supplies of PPE. In North Carolina, Governor Cooper has recognized funeral service operations including crematories as Essential Businesses which assures priority access to PPE within North Carolina. We have heard scattered reports that some funeral establishments are encountering shortages of PPE and are working cooperatively with each other in replenishing supplies where needed.

This issue is critical to the operations of funeral service operations and providers. We note that the National Funeral Directors Association has made similar requests at the federal level and were successful in having the Department of Homeland Security designate funeral service workers as "critical infrastructure workers" as reported in the March 20, 2020, Advisory to Licensees.

Please visit the following link to the NFDA for more information on PPE:

<https://www.nfda.org/covid-19/frequently-asked-questions/personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

Stay-At-Home Orders

We continue to receive calls regarding the number of individuals allowed to gather for funerals. There are specific requirements in the Governor's Executive Order 121 which imposed a statewide stay-at-home order for all North Carolina citizens. This Order limits public gatherings to no more than 10 individuals, but the Order does exempt funeral services from that number and allows up to 50 individuals to gather for a funeral service.

You must determine whether or not you are also under a county or city order which could impose greater restrictions than the Governor's Executive Order. *For information on how to comply with city or county orders where applicable, it is important for you to contact a city or county attorney or your own legal counsel for guidance.*

From the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner [OCME]

Dr. Michelle Aurelius, Chief Medical Examiner, has announced that her office is fully committed to the health and safety of local medical examiners and funeral home partners in responding to the Coronavirus pandemic in North Carolina. She has conveyed to the Board guidelines for local medical examiners and funeral home employees for taking care of those whose deaths resulted from COVID-19 infection and who are to be cremated. In summary, viewing of a decedent for cremation authorization will not be required for those cases with COVID-19, coronavirus, or suspected COVID-19 on the death certificate.

We have posted two documents from Dr. Aurelius which explain in detail this new guideline and a sample cremation authorization form that may contain inserted language in the case of COVID-19 related deaths. These documents are posted under Important Information & Communications on our **Coronavirus Advisory** page at www.ncbfs.org.

By the Numbers

As of 11:35 a.m. April 3, 2020

NC Cases*	NC Deaths**	NC Completed Tests	Currently Hospitalized
2,093	19	31,598	259

* This number reflects cases that were tested and returned positive, including the NC State Laboratory of Public Health and reporting hospital and commercial labs. All data is preliminary. Not all cases of COVID-19 are tested, so this does not represent the total number of people in North Carolina who have or had COVID-19.

** This number reflects deaths reported to public health in persons with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19. Deaths will be included in this count after confirmation by local public health departments.