



An Advisory To Licenseesfrom 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.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION & UPDATES FOR LICENSEES

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT [PPE]

As the number of coronavirus infections continue to rise in North Carolina, there are increasing concerns regarding the supply of PPE for funeral licensees and those who are engaged in the removal and transportation of human remains. As we have noted in earlier advisories, those who are removing and transporting dead human bodies must assure strict adherence to CDC guidelines as well as Universal Precautions associated with the disposition of human remains.

Personal Protective Equipment is essential in removals and transfers. We have had scattered reports that PPE is running short, or that it may be difficult to replenish supplies. In other cases, we are hearing that some licensees are reluctant to make a transfer given the risks associated with transmission of the COVID-19 virus. We are recommending the following steps to address these issues:

- *I Need Additional PPE – What Should I Do?*

Any licensed establishment that has a short supply of PPE or needs to replenish supplies must call your local Emergency Management Office. Please convey that funeral licensees, morticians and deathcare workers are considered in federal guidelines from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as Essential Critical Infrastructure. Local emergency management administrators will be familiar with replenishing PPE and supply chains that can help alleviate shortages.

- *Can I Ask About the Cause of Death for Decedents When Planning A Removal and Transfer?*

Yes. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services exempts funeral directors, morticians and medical examiners from non-disclosure requirements of the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA] as necessary for said personnel to carry out their duties. The statutory reference in the federal code is 45 CFR § 164.512(g)(2). You may ask this critical information, but generally it's not mandatory for clinicians or health care providers to disclose it, unless state or federal law otherwise so mandates for the particular health condition.

GUIDELINES FOR ESSENTIAL BUSINESSES AS DEFINED IN EXECUTIVE ORDER 131

We continue to hear from licensees regarding the impact of Executive Order 131 that Governor Cooper issued on April 9, 2020, requiring stronger social distancing for retail businesses to follow. While the Board cannot offer legal guidance on the interpretation, application or enforcement of a gubernatorial order, we do encourage that you consult with your firm's attorney or seek guidance from your county or municipal attorney's office for guidance. We are including for your information Frequently Asked Questions regarding the Executive Order in hopes that you will find it helpful. We have posted a document entitled **Executive Order 131: FAQ's** under **Important Information & Communications** on our Coronavirus Advisory page.

EXAMINATIONS FOR NATIONAL AND STATE BOARDS; LAWS, RULES & REGULATIONS

As discussed in earlier advisories to you, Board examinations were suspended in March because the testing proctor, Pearson Vue closed many of their testing sites due to the pandemic. They have begun to reopen some sites on a very limited basis, and we have submitted names for those eligible for the Laws, Rules and Regulations exam to The Conference in hopes that sites serving North Carolina will reopen even if on a limited basis. For more information, please visit these two websites. The first is for The International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards [The Conference], and the second is for Pearson Vue, testing site administrator.

<https://theconferenceonline.org/covid-update/>

<https://home.pearsonvue.com/coronavirus-update>

COVID-19 IN NORTH CAROLINA

Updated daily by 11 a.m. Last updated 10:35 a.m., April 20, 2020.

Laboratory-Confirmed Cases	Deaths	Completed Tests	Currently Hospitalized	Number of Counties
6,764	179	79,484	373	93

*Laboratory-Confirmed Cases reflect cases that were tested and returned positive, including the NC State Laboratory of Public Health and reporting hospital and commercial labs. All data are 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.

*Deaths reflect deaths in persons with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 reported by local health departments to the NC Department of Health and Human Services.

*Completed tests reflect testing completed by the NC State Laboratory of Public Health and reporting hospital and commercial labs.

*Currently hospitalized reflect the number of patients with COVID-19 that are currently hospitalized in reporting hospitals.