



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

On April 9th, we provided you a memorandum from Dr. Michelle Aurelius, Chief Medical Examiner, concerning guidelines and information for post-mortem COVID-19 testing through the medical examiner system. Dr. Aurelius has updated this important information and replaced the earlier memorandum which was dated April 7, 2020, with the one which follows:

To: North Carolina Medical Examiners, North Carolina Board of Funeral Service
From: Michelle Aurelius, MD, Chief Medical Examiner
Date: April 21, 2020



Subject: Update Re: Medical Examiner System's Testing of Decedents for COVID-19

As the situation surrounding COVID-19 continues to evolve, so does the information and recommendations provided by the State of North Carolina. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner released guidance for the medical examiner system's testing of decedents on April 7, 2020. **This memorandum replaces that guidance.** In response to changes in testing resources and protocol, NC DHHS released new updates on April 20, 2020 for COVID-19 testing for clinicians and laboratories ([COVID-19 guidance for North Carolina clinicians and laboratories](#)) in the attached document. The update is for clinicians and includes:

- Updated laboratory testing guidance,
- Updated criteria for submission of specimens to the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health and
- Replacement of information that is not North Carolina-specific with links to relevant CDC guidance.

There is now increased access to testing for COVID-19 for patients and testing can be considered for any patient in whom COVID-19 is suspected. From a medical examiner system perspective, this means that it will be more likely that symptomatic patients, who ultimately die and may be found at home, have already had testing performed for COVID-19. As noted in prior messages to medical examiners, deaths due to known or suspected COVID-19 do not necessarily fall under medical examiner jurisdiction.

However, permission is no longer required from your local public health departments to submit for COVID-19 testing. Your autopsy centers may be able to provide guidance and access to testing kits when it is appropriate to swab decedents for COVID-19.

Please note that postmortem testing results are most helpful when the specimens are collected and shipped as quickly as possible. In addition, collected specimens must be immediately refrigerated, stored at 2-8° C, and received by the testing laboratory no longer than 72hrs post-collection. If longer storage is needed, specimens can be frozen at -70 ° C and shipped on dry ice.

COVID-19 testing should **NOT** occur in the following circumstances:

1. Where pre-mortem testing has already occurred
2. Decomposition (defined for this purpose as at least presence of skin marbling or green discoloration other than a small area of the abdomen)
3. Decedent has been dead for 72 hours or longer
4. Nasopharyngeal (NP) sample cannot make it to the testing center in less than 72 hours despite refrigeration at 2-8 ° C and cold packs for packaging
5. Additional requirements for packaging and transport of nasopharyngeal swabs cannot be met based on the laboratory the specimen will be submitted to

To ensure appropriate tracking, if testing is performed, MEs should include that information on the Report of Investigation by Medical Examiner (RIME), noting on page four that specimens have been submitted for testing and through what agency/laboratory.

- If results are received before the RIME is submitted, those results should be included in the RIME and may be included in the death certificate IF RELEVANT to the death
- If results are NOT received prior to completion of the RIME and may miss the 14-day submission, send the RIME in via normal channels, noting that results were not available at the time of submission
- Upon later receipt of testing results, send a copy to the ocme.eir@dhhs.nc.gov email.

If testing is performed by a pathologist on an autopsy case, the pathologists should include that information and the results on the autopsy report.

As the situation evolves and we learn more about COVID-19, resources, and guidance, this guidance may be revised further.

Thank you all for your continued critical hard work and dedication to your decedents, the community, and the families left behind especially during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resources (all accessed 4/20/2020):

- CDC Guidance for reuse of N95 masks: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hcwcontrols/recommendedguidanceextuse.html>
- CDC Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of Facemasks: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/face-masks.html>
- Screening questions and definitions: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>
- NC DHHS resource: www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus [ncdhhs.gov]