



OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

**Ponni Arunkumar, MD**

Chief Medical Examiner

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March 16, 2020

To

Hospitals and Nursing homes,

On March 9, 2020, Governor Pritzker announced a Disaster Proclamation (the Illinois equivalent of a state of emergency) related to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

In light of the proclamation and because our jurisdiction includes threats to public health, per Cook County Code Sections 38-118 and 38-120, we are responsible for signing the death certificates on all deaths related to COVID-19.

Where cases have been diagnosed in hospitals, they will be treated as records review cases- medical records will be examined and the body released to funeral homes, without coming to the medical examiner's office. The death certificate will be signed on the basis of hospital records.

Suspected cases that have not been diagnosed will be double-bagged and disinfected before transport to the office. At the office, we will complete our examination (whether external or autopsy) in an isolated room, using appropriate personal protective equipment and minimizing the number of people who come in contact with the body. Specimens will be drawn for infectious disease testing and those specimens will be shipped to the designated agency for diagnosis, all in accordance with the recommendations and guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Once the exam is completed, bodies will be double bagged and disinfected again and then stored in a refrigerated truck. Funeral homes will be notified prior to pick up of confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Below link provides postmortem specimen handling details from CDC.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html>

Thank you,

*Ponni Arunkumar, M.D.*

Ponni Arunkumar, MD  
Chief Medical Examiner, Cook County