

To All

SMS Members/ Chief Directorates/ Directorates / Regional / District Offices, Sub-Structures / All Facility Managers/ City of Cape Town / Higher Education Institutions / Private Sector

**CIRCULAR H 49/2020: WESTERN CAPE GOVERNMENT (WCG) GUIDE TO FAMILIES, UNDERTAKERS AND COMMUNITIES RELATING TO THE MANAGEMENT OF A DECEASED WHO PASSED AWAY BECAUSE OF EITHER POSITIVE OR SUSPECTED COVID-19**

**Introduction**

There is much that is unknown about the SARS-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19) but what is known is that the virus most often spreads from person to person via respiratory droplets when people cough or sneeze. These droplets end up on other objects or people and this is causing the transfer of the virus.

The risk of infection from the deceased is therefore decreased because they do not cough or sneeze, however, the risk is still high in terms of family members who may have been exposed to the virus while the person was alive and in terms of direct handling of the body where the family touches the body without the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

In South Africa, we have various cultural and religious beliefs which may have to be adapted in the interest of protecting the population at large.

This guide is in accordance with current published National Health Environmental Health guidelines (dated 27 March 2020) that may be amended as the pandemic progresses.

**What to do when a person passes away at home**

When a person dies at home of suspected or positive COVID-19, the family is encouraged not to touch the remains and leave the remains in the room where the person passed away.

In cases where the death was due to any unnatural causes such as trauma caused by accidents, murder and suicide for example, and the suspicion is that the individual also suffered from COVID-19, the SAPS are to be notified. In cases where no foul play is suspected, it would be advisable to contact an undertaker who is trained in managing such scenarios and who has the appropriate PPE for removal.

While any form of contact is strongly discouraged, there are religious and cultural practices that require that human remains be washed before burial. If families wish to perform these rituals, then it is advised that this is done by members of the religious group who are properly trained in the correct use of PPE.

It is advised that the deceased's belongings be properly cleaned with a solution containing at least 70% alcohol or 0.5% bleach. Any clothing should be washed with warm water at a temperature of at least 60 to 90°C.

It is strongly advised that once the remains are prepared for the burial, that no further contact is allowed. The deceased's face may be shown at the funeral if there is no contact in the form of kissing or touching of the deceased's face.

People with respiratory diseases should not form part of the viewing process unless they wear a medical face mask to prevent further transmission of possible disease.

It is advised that people who are older than 60-years and immunosuppressed should not have contact with the body.

### **Funerals**

Aside from the regulations relating to the funerals, the following information (guidelines) should also be observed:

- Human remains can be infectious on surfaces up to nine days, therefore it is important to clean all surfaces that the body was in contact with.
- Cremation is the preferred method for a funeral but if the family requires a burial then this process should take no longer than two hours.
- All attempts should be made to bury a deceased who passed away from confirmed or suspected COVID-19 within three days if there is no indication for a post mortem examination.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Cloete', enclosed within a circular scribble.

**DR K CLOETE**  
**HEAD: WESTERN CAPE GOVERNMENT HEALTH**  
**DATE: 08 April 2020**