



# DELAWARE COUNTY CORONER

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**RICHARD A. HOWELL JR.,** Coroner

## **COVID-19 Pandemic**

### **Delaware County Coroner's Office Pandemic Mass Fatality Plan CEMP-Annex**

#### **Directive 2020-4**

The COVID-19 pandemic does not qualify as an acute mass fatality event but one that is non-acute in which has potential for mass fatalities to manifest over time. The current Delaware County Mass Fatality plan structure is geared towards an acute mass fatality event. However, parts of the plan have been extrapolated and expounded on to support the current pandemic health crisis.

#### **Delaware County Coroner's Office Responsibilities**

The Delaware County Coroner's Office will maintain its function as the main medico-legal death investigation agency within Delaware County. In a pandemic scenario, the following functions are not necessarily required: FAC, positive identification stations, or mobile morgue at incident site.

In a pandemic scenario, the deaths are considered natural and the Coroner's office does not have the legal requirement to investigate the death or sign the death certificate. Hospital physicians will be encouraged to sign the death certificates of confirmed COVID-19 cases of individuals who died within the hospital setting. The Coroner's office will be responsible for signing the death certificates of individuals who expire outside of a hospital setting if no COVID-19 testing was performed.

The following outline will cover the broad aspect of the Coroner's office modified mass fatality plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **1. Structure**

- a. The Delaware County Coroner's Office will operate under a unified command structure, under the umbrella of ESF-8 (Emergency Support Function #8) and supporting agencies
  - i. Fatality Management Branch Director and PIO
    1. Coroner – Richard Howell 765-212-6308
    2. Chief Deputy Coroner – Gavin Greene 765-808-0627
  - ii. Morgue Group Supervisor (Delaware County)
    1. Autopsy Supervisor – Brad Slater, and Jim Spangler 765-747-3306
  - iii. Morgue Group Supervisor (Marion County)

iv.

1. Autopsy Supervisor – Dominique Battles, 317-709-1165

## 2. Operations

### a. Fatality Management Branch Director

- i. The Chief Deputy Coroner will maintain overall control and direction of the Delaware County Coroner's office pandemic response, as well as normal day to day operations. In addition, the Coroner will be the point of contact for EOC and ESF-8 for updates on case count, storage capacity, supply needs, and overall progress. The Coroner will be responsible for public information releases for the Delaware County Coroner's Office.
- ii. The Coroner or Chief Deputy Coroner will also coordinate release of remains to funeral homes and maintain the daily count of suspected COVID-19 cases within the morgue.

## 3. On-Scene Operations

### a. Office Consultation

- i. Any individual who is hospitalized at time of death (whether in the ER or inpatient care) who is suspected, confirmed, or pending test results will not require an investigation by the Coroner's office. These deaths will be referred to the physician for signing the death certificate.

### b. COVID-19 Reporting System

- i. The following system will be implemented as of 4/01/2020 to investigative staff. The appropriate code will be entered into the field deputy report for tracking:
  1. CV-S – scene death or hospital (ER) death, **COVID-19 suspected**, decedent has never been tested for COVID-19 but exhibited similar symptoms immediately or in the days prior to death, or was in isolation after potential exposure but never tested, or had exposure to any individual who tested positive
  2. CV-S/P – scene death or hospital death (inpatient or ER), **COVID-19 suspected, pending** test result, the decedent has been tested for virus but test results are still pending
  3. CV-C – scene or hospital death, **COVID-19 confirmed**, decedent received a positive COVID-19 test result

### c. Death Investigation Action Plan

- i. Any individual who dies outside of a hospital setting meeting the following criteria will be subject to an investigation for suspicion of COVID-19:
  1. Flu like symptoms, high fever, cough, body aches, tiredness and/or difficulty breathing immediately prior or in the days leading up to death

2. The Coroner's office cannot operate within the CDC or healthcare system guidelines for screening suspected COVID-19 scene deaths for the following reasons:
  - a. If the individual refused to go to the hospital, seek medical care or only reported feeling ill to immediate family
  - b. Unknown if the decedent traveled to an affected high-risk area
  - c. Unknown if the decedent was in direct or close contact to a positive or high-risk individual
  - d. Transient or undocumented individual
- ii. Investigation Protocol
  1. All investigators have been provided information and PPE to respond to suspected COVID-19 scene deaths in compliance with the CDC guidelines, including:
    - a. N-95 face mask
    - b. Tyvec Suit
    - c. Face Shield
    - d. Shoe Covers
    - e. Gloves
  2. Investigators will ask for all individuals, including witnesses or family, to immediately evacuate the scene to reduce likelihood of investigator exposure.
  3. Investigators will gather all necessary information on scene from family, witnesses and first responders while maintaining a distance at minimum of 6 feet
  4. The investigator and/or his designee along with one (1) other first responder will enter the scene in full PPE, place the decedent in a transportation bag, and transport the decedent to the morgue at IU-Health Ball Memorial Hospital or a temporary storage cooling units located at IU-Health Ball Memorial Hospital or a Delaware County designated off site temporary morgue.
  5. The investigator will inform the Pathologist and or other staff members of IU-Health Ball Memorial Hospital of the possible COVID-19 scene death
  6. The investigator will code the investigation appropriately within the Field Deputy Report (as mentioned above) and follow all normal investigation procedures and protocols

#### 4. Human Remains Transport from a scene.

##### a. GENERAL GUIDANCE:

- i. When you are on the scene, wear usual PPE (gloves, masks, gown) and practice social distancing.
- ii. Cover the decedents face with a barrier inside the bag. Ex. Plastic bag over the decedents head.
- iii. Disinfect the outside of the bag with an EPA-registered hospital disinfectant applied according to the manufacturer's recommendations.



- b. Upon arrival from a scene to the isolation morgue compartment with a suspected COVID-19 death,
  - i. The Delaware County Coroner's Office will work with IU-Health Ball Memorial Hospital and the Delaware County Health Department in designing a policy for the handling and processing of any suspected and or tested positive COVID-19 death.
  - ii. The test will be administered inside IU-Health Ball Memorial Hospital or the temporary morgue unit.
  - iii. The transportation bag should be labeled on the outside of the bag with the decedent's **full name, date of birth, date of death, when test was taken and name of funeral home.**
  - iv. Follow standard routine procedures when transporting the body after specimens have been collected and the body has been bagged.
  - v. Disinfect the outside of the bag with an EPA-registered hospital disinfectant applied according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
  - vi. **ALWAYS** wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling the body bag.
  - vii. If the decedent is confirmed to be positive for COVID-19, no additional exam will be performed, and the decedent will be released directly from the morgue or temporary morgue unit to the funeral home of the family's choice for final disposition.

## 5. Disposition Operations

### a. Death Certificates

- i. The Coroner's office will follow the death certificate guidelines released by the National Vital Statistics System on March 4, 2020 for certifying COVID-19 deaths

CAUSE OF DEATH (See instructions and examples)		Approximate interval: Onset to death
32. <b>PART I.</b> Enter the <u>chain of events</u> —diseases, injuries, or complications—that directly caused the death. DO NOT enter terminal events such as cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, or ventricular fibrillation without showing the etiology. DO NOT ABBREVIATE. Enter only one cause on a line. Add additional lines if necessary.		
IMMEDIATE CAUSE (Final disease or condition resulting in death) →	a. <u>Acute respiratory distress syndrome</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):	<u>2 days</u>
Sequentially list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed on line a. Enter the <b>UNDERLYING CAUSE</b> (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death) <b>LAST</b>	b. <u>Pneumonia</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):	<u>10 days</u>
	c. <u>COVID-19</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):	<u>10 days</u>
	d. _____ Due to (or as a consequence of):	_____
<b>PART II.</b> Enter other <u>significant conditions contributing to death</u> but not resulting in the underlying cause given in PART I.		33. WAS AN AUTOPSY PERFORMED? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
		34. WERE AUTOPSY FINDINGS AVAILABLE TO COMPLETE THE CAUSE OF DEATH? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
35. DID TOBACCO USE CONTRIBUTE TO DEATH? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Probably <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	36. IF FEMALE: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant within past year <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant at time of death <input type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant, but pregnant within 42 days of death <input type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant, but pregnant 43 days to 1 year before death <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown if pregnant within the past year	
37. MANNER OF DEATH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Homicide <input type="checkbox"/> Accident <input type="checkbox"/> Pending Investigation <input type="checkbox"/> Suicide <input type="checkbox"/> Could not be determined		

## 6. Safety

- a. By the nature of the day to day operations, the Coroner's office cannot close to the public. Ongoing day to day operations involving the public include: property release, positive identification and family notification. However, the Coroner's office has instituted strict guidelines to limit public access and have direct general inquiries through the main department email.
- b. Each investigator will be expected to disseminate and maintain safety.
  - i. Each investigator is adhering to safety guidelines and using appropriate level disinfectants for main transit and administrative areas.
    - 1. Following appropriate PPE protocols on suspected COVID-19 scene deaths. Treating all deceased as if suspected COVID-19
    - 2. Investigative staff are regularly disinfecting workstations with the appropriate disinfectant.
  - ii. The office manager will ensure the necessary supplies are being ordered, including hand soap, sanitizing cleaning solutions, hand sanitizer, and PPE.

## 7. Site Security

- a. All locations of file storage or decedent storage are secured behind lock and key.
- a. The temporary morgue unit should be present on location at IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital at 2401 West University Avenue, Muncie. The temporary morgue unit will have the ability to lock via a locking device on the exterior door and require a direct electric line connection for power.
- b. IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital having security cameras on the exterior facing the location of the temporary morgue unit to monitor any pedestrian traffic in or around the unit.
- c. IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital also having 24/7 police force available shall make routine security rounds securing a temporary morgue unit.

## 8. Logistics

- a. The Coroner's office will request that as many as two 8x20 temporary storage cooling units or
- b. Self-contained refrigerated semi-trailers to be used a temporary morgue units
- c. The units will be exclusively used for the temporary cold storage of potential or suspected COVID-19 decedents.
- d. The temporary cold storage units will also be available in the circumstances of:
  - i. Supporting Iu Health Ball Memorial Hospital morgue surge
    - 1. This will or could possibly result in financial assistance request
  - ii. Funeral home refusing to pick up a COVID-19 positive decedent
  - iii. Normal day to day operations will use morgue inside of the hospital.

The Coroner's office will retain the temporary cold storage units for as long as it deemed necessary at the discretion of the Delaware County Coroner.

## 9. Finance

- a. The Coroner will maintain a separate tracking of all COVID-19 related expenses included the separation of PPE use from normal day to day use to the use on a suspected COVID-19 case

- b. The Coroner or his designee will file for Public Assistance for his office should it be made available through FEMA or HHS

#### 10. Coroner's Office Needs

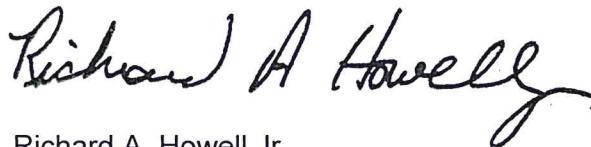
- a. Personal Protection Equipment
  - i. At present time, the Coroner's office is working on consolidating and evaluating PPE needs. The Coroner's office vendors and the Delaware County EMA has been able to fulfill orders for PPE, sanitation supplies and transportation bags.
  - ii. As this could change during the length of the public health crisis, the Delaware County Coroner's Office will evaluate safety equipment daily.
  - iii. The Coroner will then communicate any needs surpassing current available inventory to the Coroner and EMA for supplemental assistance.
- b. Site Security
  - i. The site location of the temporary morgue units may need at some point additional security 24/7 for an added level of security, as well as to prevent pedestrian or unauthorized access to the property.
- c. Visual Blockades
  - i. Visual Blockades may be essential due to any onlookers or media.
  - ii. The purpose of the visual blockades would be to reduce public viewing of placing or removing decedents from the temporary morgue units containers.

#### 11. Concerns

- a. Potential employee exposure
  - i. In the event an identified member of the Delaware County Coroner's Office is exposed, placed in isolation, or hospitalized and is no longer able to perform their duties, another Deputy Coroner will need to handle multiple roles and/or responsibilities.

The Delaware County Coroner's Office reserves the right to modify or update the plan as needed based on day to day operations and community need.

Signed,



Richard A. Howell Jr.  
Delaware County Coroner

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