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Ebola: Frequently Asked Questions for Hospitals and Morticians¹

1. Does the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) issue regulations or policy regarding safe handling of the remains of Ebola victims?

No, the OCME can make recommendations but has no regulatory authority.

2. Are Ebola deaths medical examiner cases?

No, not unless there are other aspects of the death that place them under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner.

3. Since leak proof containers are required, will the OCME supply the containers?

No, the OCME does not provide body bags or other equipment.

4. Is a standard body bag sufficient in Ebola deaths?

No. The goal is to completely protect handlers from the Ebola virus, which is in fluids purged from the body. The main body enclosure must be impervious to fluid leaks. Since this is a highly lethal disease, there should be multiple and redundant coverings of the body to absolutely prevent any fluid leaks and allow safe transport and storage of the body without special personal protective equipment.

5. Are dead bodies with Ebola infection still contagious?

Yes, absolutely.

6. Are remains from Ebola cases infectious after the body has been cremated?

No.

¹ This information represents the opinions and recommendations of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. It does not reflect legal advice and is subject to change based on newer information from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and others. Check for updates to this information at the following webpages: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/Ebola/> or <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/medexam/>. The CDC website is: <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html>



Accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners

7. How long is the Ebola virus viable in dead bodies and bodily fluids?

We do not know.

8. Can we transport Ebola decedents across state lines?

Interstate transport should be coordinated with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention by calling the Emergency Operations Center at 770.488.7100. The mode of transportation (i.e., airline or ground transport), must be considered carefully, taking into account distance and the most expeditious route. If shipping by air is needed, the remains must be labeled as dangerous goods in accordance with Department of Transportation Regulations (49 Code of Federal Regulations 173.196).

9. Does personal protective equipment (PPE) need to be worn by funeral directors after the body is sealed in a leak-proof container and decontaminated?

No.

10. Can bodies be safely viewed by family?

No.

11. After the body is sealed in a leak-proof container and decontaminated, should the container be opened?

No.

12. Can the body of an Ebola victim be safely embalmed?

No.

13. Will an Ebola decedent need a cremation certificate from the medical examiner?

Yes, but the body cannot be examined because the container is sealed and will not be opened. Contact your District OCME for a cremation certificate based on review of documentation.

14. When and where should the body be sealed in a leak-proof container and decontaminated?

As soon after death as practicable, at the health care facility before release and transport.

15. What personal protective equipment should be used while sealing and decontaminating the body?

Full body coverage with respirator, double gloves, and shoe covers. Disposable materials are preferred.

16. How should disposable personal protective equipment be discarded?

Sealed biohazard bags, preferable double bagged, and incinerated as other medical waste.

17. What should be used to decontaminate the body coverings?

10% bleach solution.

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