PANDEMIC: MORTUARY

INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately, not everyone who battles with the disease will live through it. What makes a difference to morticians, embalmers, and other who help lay the body to rest, is the risk associated with handling the remains of someone who has passed. This is due to the potential of these individuals contracting the disease from the deceased. This lesson will go over safe practices for transporting the body, embalming, and the common areas of the mortuary.

Note: The guidance given in this lesson should be used in conjunction with all of the other OSHA programs that your company has.

TRANSPORTATION OF THE DECEASED

When you are preparing to transport the decedent from a home or healthcare facility, there are many steps you can take to help protect yourself from potential exposure. It should be noted that unless the cause of death has been confirmed, all bodies should be treated as though they died of the disease. You can prepare for transport by:

- Making sure you have all of the appropriate personal protective equipment for the pickup. This includes any PPE needed for anticipated splashes or aerosolization of bodily fluids. PPE can consist of a face mask, safety glasses or goggles, disposable gloves, disposable grown, face shield, and respiratory protection.
- This may also include calling the facility to find out about any additional precautions, guidelines, or procedures that you may need to follow when you arrive.
- Continue practicing proper hand hygiene by either sanitizing your hands with a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol or washing with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds.
- Additionally, it is recommended that you use body bags to prevent splashing or aerosolization of fluids.
- You should disinfect the outside of body bags with an EPA-registered disinfectant (such as wipes or aerosols); and
- Frequently clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces in the vehicle, including areas where the body bag has rested during transport.

EMBALMING

Embalmers need to take additional precautions when preparing a body for a service or burial. Unlike transportation employees, there is a greater risk of exposure to splashes or aerosolization of bodily fluids due to manipulation of the body and removal of bodily fluids such as waste and blood. Embalmers should do the following when working with a body:

- Keep the minimal number of required embalmers in the room.

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- Practice proper hand hygiene. Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol and use soap and water for visibly soiled hands.
- Make sure to wear the appropriate PPE, including PPE for any anticipated splashing or aerosolization of bodily fluids.
- Perform the embalming in a well-ventilated room. It is recommended to use a room with a local exhaust ventilation or use local exhaust ventilation at the mortuary table and near any aerosol-generating tasks.
- Do NOT recirculate exhaust air or mix the exhaust air with the buildings general ventilation system.
- Additionally, it is recommended that you use portable HEPA air cleaners and ultraviolet air disinfecting systems whenever possible.
- Cover the face of the deceased with a disposable mask or similar coving whenever the body is moved or manipulated to help with the expulsion of air or gases.
- Make sure that the body is in a sealed body bag when placing it in storage or when transporting; and
- Frequently clean and disinfect work surfaces, tables, tools, instruments, body bags, and equipment. This includes immediately after completion of the embalming process or other body preparation activities.

COMMON AREAS

In conjunction with transportation vehicles and embalming rooms, employees should also focus on common areas. These areas can include viewing rooms, office areas, meeting rooms, and so forth. There are many ways employees can help keep themselves and families safe in these areas, including:

- Meeting with families virtually or over the phone.
- Using a face covering when holding in person meetings.
- Frequently washing your hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Frequently cleaning and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces and objects such as doorknobs and handles, desks, chairs and pews, bathroom surfaces, keyboards and mouses, tablets, phones; and any other commonly touched surface or object.
- When cleaning and disinfecting you should use an EPA-registered disinfectant (such as wipes or aerosols), an alcohol solution with at least 70% alcohol, or household bleach solution when cleaning and disinfecting.
- Make sure to follow your local area's guidance on limits for group gatherings.
- If funerals or services cannot be held as an in-person event, you or the family may want to consider live streaming funeral services.
- Make sure that soap and hand sanitizer dispensers are refilled as needed.
- Use alternatives to handshaking.
- As an added precaution, it is recommended that when the weather permits, keeping doors and windows open.
- Remember to practice social distancing whenever possible.
- Communicate the steps that you are taking with the community; and most importantly

- Staying home if you are sick.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, during a pandemic there may be an uptick in the amount of people who pass away from fighting the disease. Handling and preparing the deceased could potentially expose you to the disease if certain procedures and protocols are not followed. Even simple things as wearing the appropriate PPE and frequently washing your hands can go a long way in protecting your health. Remember, that you play an important role in helping families find closure with the passing of a loved one and that the pandemic will eventually pass.