



# Arkansas Department of Health

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March 24, 2020

## COVID-19: Guidance for Medical Examiners and Coroners

### Purpose:

This document provides guidance on the handling and collection of postmortem specimens from deceased persons under investigation (PUIs), as well as guidance on biosafety and infection control practices. This guidance is based on the current CDC recommendations based on what is currently known about COVID-19.

### Overview:

Postmortem activities should be conducted with a focus on avoiding aerosol generating procedures and ensuring that if aerosol generation is likely (e.g., when using an oscillating saw) that appropriate engineering controls and personal protective equipment (PPE) are used.

### Engineering Control Recommendations:

An Airborne Infection Isolation Room (AIIR) is not required if only nasopharyngeal (NP) swab specimen is going to be obtained from deceased persons. This is because those procedures will not induce coughing or sneezing. Personnel should adhere to Standard Precautions as described above.

An Airborne Infection Isolation Room (AIIR) is required when performing an autopsy on a deceased person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

### PPE Recommendations:

Recommended PPE for obtaining NP swab specimens: nonsterile, nitrile gloves; heavy-duty gloves over nitrile gloves if there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds, or other injuries that break the skin; a clean, long-sleeved fluid-resistant or impermeable gown to protect skin and clothing; a plastic face shield or a face mask and goggles to protect the face, eyes, nose, and mouth from splashes of potentially infectious bodily fluids.

Recommended PPE for performing an autopsy: Double surgical gloves interposed with a layer of cut-proof synthetic mesh gloves; fluid-resistant or impermeable gown; waterproof apron; goggles or face shield; NIOSH-certified disposable N-95 respirator or higher (Powered, air-purifying respirators (PAPRs) with HEPA filters may provide increased worker comfort during extended autopsy procedures).

Doff PPE carefully to avoid contaminating yourself and before leaving the autopsy suite or adjacent anteroom (<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppe-sequence.pdf> icon).

### Specimen Collection:

If an autopsy is performed, collection of the following postmortem specimens is recommended:

Postmortem clinical specimens for testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19:

- Upper respiratory tract swabs: Nasopharyngeal Swab (NP) on dacron or synthetic swab (same as for influenza testing)

- Lower respiratory tract swab: Swab from each lung
- Separate clinical specimens for testing of other respiratory pathogens and other postmortem testing as indicated
- Formalin-fixed autopsy tissues from lung, upper airway, and other major organs

If an autopsy is NOT performed, collection of the following postmortem specimens is recommended:

- Postmortem clinical specimens for testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, to include only upper respiratory tract swabs: Nasopharyngeal Swab (NP) on dacron or other synthetic swab (same as for influenza).

Detailed guidance for postmortem specimen collection can be found in the section: [Collection of Postmortem Clinical and Pathologic Specimens](#).

#### Preparation of Specimen for Shipment:

You will need to have the proper swabs (dacron or other synthetic, same as for influenza) and tube of Viral Transport Media (ADH lab will accept sterile saline if no viral transport media is available). You may have to cooperate with local partners to get these supplies.

After collecting and properly securing and labeling specimens in primary containers with the appropriate media/solution, they must be transferred from the autopsy suite in a safe manner to laboratory staff who can process them for shipping.

- 1) Within the autopsy suite, primary containers should be placed into a larger secondary container.
- 2) If possible, the secondary container should then be placed into a resealable plastic bag that was not in the autopsy suite when the specimens were collected.
- 3) The resealable plastic bag should then be placed into a biological specimen bag with absorbent material; and then can be transferred outside of the autopsy suite.
  - a. Workers receiving the biological specimen bag outside the autopsy suite or anteroom should wear disposable nitrile gloves.

#### Submission to ADH:

- 1) Call ADH Physicians Hotline (1-844-930-3023) to get approval for the test to be performed at ADH. (If by chance you are wanting to test at a commercial laboratory, you do not need to call for permission)
- 2) ADH Physician will need your email address to get you the information you need to properly register and ship your sample to the ADH lab. You will need the following information: basic biographical data of the patient and a brief case history, as well as your contact information so the result can be called and sent to you.

For other questions, Coroners can call the ADH Physicians Hotline at 1-844-930-3023 ask to speak to the physician.

#### References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

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