

Q&A from March 18, 2020 OACFP Webinar

Please note – This is a rapidly evolving situation and this information may become out of date in coming days and weeks. The answers to these questions represent the best advice of OACFP, the BAO and Dr. Siu under the current circumstances.

1. Please address the contagion and non-FD staff risk

Dr. Siu - It's very important to have current written policies and procedures in place – in writing and on large signage. Symptomatic people (those showing symptoms of Covid-19 which include fever, shortness of breath, cough) should not be allowed in the building or during arrangements. If they insist on involvement, a mask and gloves **MUST** be worn.

For asymptomatic people, discourage hand shaking, remove fabric furniture from the visitation rooms and arrangement offices or cover with a vinyl covering which can be cleaned. Fabric cannot be disinfected. There is a “fogging” process for this purpose but it's very expensive. For visitation – only 50 people are allowed at a time. Line up – insisting upon social distancing in the line-up. IE: 10 people in a line – six feet apart. The balance of them can wait in car. Get in control of this procedure before visitations begin and have all staff informed of a consistent policy.

The biggest risk is contagion from other people and acquiring virus from common areas. Follow hand hygiene, cough hygiene, and social distancing to prevent spread. If showing symptoms self-isolate for 14 days. Those with compromised immunity and elderly are at greatest risk.

2. Are funeral homes considered an essential service? Can they choose to close?

Funeral and transfer service establishments are privately owned and operated and as such are not legally considered ‘essential services’. (They could be deemed essential by legislation or Ontario Superior Court of Justice Orders in case of an emergency.) The **BAO** strongly recommends that funeral homes stay open, as is your duty in your chosen profession.

3. Do you recommend restricting the number of family members who should come in to make arrangements for an at-need call?

Dr. Siu - Only deal with asymptomatic people.

Yes. Social distancing is important. Use a larger office/space to make arrangements. Maintain distance between those participating in the arrangement. Limit number of family members involved in the arrangement interview. Refrain from sharing items like pens.

Remove any unnecessary items that could be shared i.e., magazines, brochures, candy bowls. Disinfect shared items and hands after use i.e., catalogues, door handles, tables, phones. Ideally, arrangements could be made over the phone, by email or fax.

4. Does COVID-19 affect transplantable tissue concerning deceased donors?

Dr. Siu - This is not our concern. Trillium will evaluate this situation. They are still harvesting at this time and likely tested before harvesting.

5. Does the provincial gathering limit of 50 apply to funerals?

Yes.

6. Does the virus die at death?

Dr. Siu - NO

7. What are the embalming precautions for a COVID-19 case, precautions doing transfers at possible infected areas?

Dr. Siu - The main concern during the embalming process is during aspiration. Aspiration is an “aerosol generating procedure.” Use universal precautions at all times. Medical certificates often don’t reflect the cause of death or all contributing factors. N95 masks are definitely required during this procedure.

Refer to [*Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) and [*Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) on the **BAO** website. The BAO’s homepage has several valuable links, including its COVID-19 web post on the top right. <https://thebao.ca/>

8. For how long after death does the virus remain active?

Dr. Siu – No idea – cells are still alive.

9. Given effective products for disinfection are in short supply, what is the feeling as to whether using one-part bleach to nine-parts water now outweighs what are perhaps more safe products as being effective.

According to the [CDC website](#): For household disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.

Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the

product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.

- Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
 - 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or
 - 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

10. Gowning procedures for removals?

PPE information – see Appendices 3 & 4 [**Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting**](#) and [**Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting**](#) – see NFDA website and video [**“A Conversation with the CDC”**](#)

11. How are funeral homes to handle the transportation issues such as limousines where people would be enclosed in an environment together for a period of time?

Uber and Lyft have just established new protocols that prohibit more than one passenger per ride to limit driver and passenger exposure. If you have established a social distancing policy for your staff and guests in your establishment or office, it is recommended to follow these social distancing policies to your vehicles.

12. How are we expected to monitor the size of gatherings?

Have good discussions with families. Suggest that arrangements can proceed but family only to attend. Suggest webcasting or recording. Offer memorial services once regular operations are resumed. In addition, limit visitation and service information given out to the public.

13. How can small funeral homes facing a shortage of supplies, such as hand sanitizers or protective gowns, find supplies during these difficult times when suppliers are out of stock?

As the **Registrar** said in the webinar, funeral homes must use their supplies and PPE prudently during this time to ensure they have them available throughout the pandemic. Restrict the use of N95 masks, to circumstances in which they are necessary. This will help preserve your supply. Support your nearby colleagues at other funeral homes if/when they run short of supplies. Share what you can with other funeral homes, and they will return the favour in the future. Suppliers will restock as soon as they can. Prepare yourselves now, to be ready with your staff and supplies when the virus spreads in coming days and weeks.

14. How can we best reduce the risk to the vulnerable populations we serve?

Dr. Siu – Online funerals, video, ask the vulnerable to stay at home.

Have a discussions with families about the funeral home/cemetery being a public facility and ask them to limit guest list – encourage them to tell elderly and those who are immunocompromised to stay home. Offer alternatives: Live webcasting of service, recording of service, memorial service once regular operations resume.

15. How long before it's safe to embalm a COVID -19 body?

Dr. Siu – No information at this time. The **BAO** reminds you to wear PPE and follow precautions, as on their website: [*Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) ; and [*Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#)

See also [A Conversation with the CDC](#) at NFDA.org – [CDC Post Mortem Guidance](#)

16. How long does COVID19 last on a surface?

Dr. Siu – Not confirmed – perhaps 5 days. Disinfect constantly and once again, use universal precautions.

17. How long does the COVID-19 virus live in a deceased host?

Dr. Siu – Not confirmed at this time.

18. How long is COVID 19 active on a deceased body?

Dr. Siu – Not confirmed at this time. The **BAO** reminds you to wear PPE and follow precautions, as on their website: [*Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) ; and [*Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#)

**19. How do we safely work in office spaces? Work with maybe one person at a time?
Can I tell families not to meet in person if it can wait?**

See answers above and in the presentation.

20. Identification Procedures for COVID-19 Positive Deceased -

Dr. Siu – Do not rely on the Medical Certificate of Death. Use universal precautions.

Refer to Preparation other than Embalming [*Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) and [*Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) on the **BAO** website. Family to stand behind glass.

The **BAO** advises families to provide photo identification via fax or electronically in advance of the arrangement meeting.

21. If we are feeling sick must we take the 14-day quarantine?

If you have symptoms, go online to Ontario.ca and perform the [Self-Assessment](#). Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-800-797-0000 to speak with a registered nurse if you answer Yes to the questions posed.

22. Is Dys Spray effective for cleaning the belongings that come with the decedent.

Please reach out to the manufacturer directly for comment. The **BAO** reminds you to wear PPE and follow precautions, as on their website: [Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting](#) ; and [Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting](#)

23. Is the BAO working with any Municipalities regarding an epidemic in death rate?

Some municipal offices and police stations may be unable to provide burial permits. The **BAO** has been in contact with Toronto Police. Toronto Police are aware of the issue and are communicating with the BAO to resolve it. The BAO will be addressing the issuance of burial permits with the Registrar General's office in Thunder Bay and provide some direction.

24. Is the virus still transmissible after death?

Dr. Siu – Possible.

The **BAO** strongly reminds funeral professionals to wear your PPE and follow precautions, as you do for embalming and preparation of the deceased. There is no known evidence of postmortem spread of the virus. There is also no known risk associated with being in the same room with the body of someone who has died of COVID-19.

The **BAO** reminds you to wear PPE and follow precautions, as on their website: [Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting](#) ; and [Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting](#)

25. Is there anything we should be aware of specifically as it relates to transfer services?

The **BAO** recommends that funeral professionals review your procedures for identification and ensure all staff are trained to follow them. It's important that accuracy and integrity of the ID process be assured. This is where the mistakes can happen. Make sure you and your staff have these procedures down pat, which will help you avoid mistakes – such as the news on the misidentifications that occurred in Nova Scotia.

26. Concerning non-embalming procedures required for identification: Do we have to do embalming?

Please see the identification recommendations above. Embalming is not required.

27. Our building has the capacity to run two or three ceremonies simultaneously, will each ceremony be considered separate for the 50-person attendee rule or is it a max of 50 people in the building?

We would expect that the gathering of several groups of 50 people or less in one building can occur – provided the funeral establishment operator can ensure the groups arrive and leave at different times, and that at no time will there be a group of more than 50 people in one location.

We expect everyone's cooperation to ensure that the spread of the virus is avoided completely. We depend on our professional licensees to use their best efforts and professional judgement in applying and complying with the rule.

28. What is the policy regarding burials of persons infected with COVID-19?

BAO expects that cemetery operators will:

- * Use all precautions when allowing burials.
- * Ensure that attendees are less than 50 in number and encourage safe distancing from each other during grave side service.
- * Ensure that cemetery staff stay a safe distance from the Funeral Establishment staff and attendees.
- * Ensure that casket/container is disinfected prior to being placed on the lowering device.
- * Cemetery staff to attend graveside once all family and funeral staff are a safe distance away.

29. Concerning PPE and its effectiveness –

Refer to [**Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting**](#) and [**Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting**](#) on the **BAO** website.

See [**"A Conversation with the CDC"**](#) at NFDA.org – [**CDC Post Mortem Guidance**](#)

30. Update on Universal Precaution on removals & embalming procedures

Refer to [Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting](#) and [Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting](#) on the BAO website. See [“A Conversation with the CDC”](#) at NFDA.org – [CDC Post Mortem Guidance](#)

31. Visitations, funerals, yes/no. What is the unified approach recommended by the bao and provincial government?

Yes, funerals and visitations will and should continue. Necessary precautions must be followed – such as safe distancing (of six feet between people), chairs spaced apart, and attendee controls in place (50 or fewer people, not counting staff).

32. We are a Jewish cemetery. We do ritual cleaning of bodies. Are there any special requirements?

As well we don't bury cremated remains. Will this be a requirement as we will need to get Rabbinical permission?

Discourage families from bathing and/or dressing the deceased. If ritual cleaning must be done ensure that cleaning is in keeping with best practices. Wear PPE. as stated in the webinar.

33. What are the current Guidelines for the repatriation of Human Remains to and from Canada as COVID-19 is a quarantinable infectious disease? Please focus also on the USA and the stated role of the CDC requisite documents.

Dr. Siu is currently working on this document.

TBD – speak with local health unit, Office of the Chief Coroner

34. What if we have no access to masks and additional PPE due to sold out/backorder issues?

You would have to refuse to provide services if you don't have PPE. But please refer to the answer to Question 13 about preparing so that you minimize this risk.

35. What kind of precautions should I be taking while arranging a funeral for a family?

Social distancing is important. Use a larger office/space to make arrangements. Maintain distance between those participating in the arrangement. Limit number of family members involved in the arrangement interview. Refrain from sharing items like pens. Remove any unnecessary items that could be shared i.e., magazines, brochures, candy bowls. Disinfect shared items and hands after use i.e., catalogues, door handles, tables, phones. Ideally, arrangements could be made over the phone, by email or fax.

36. What precautions should be taken if a death occurs from someone who died from the Covid-19?

Refer to [*Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) and [*Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) on the **BAO** website.

See ["A Conversation with the CDC"](#) at [NFDA.org](#) – [CDC Post Mortem Guidance](#)

37. Will a Q and A be made available to give to our team?

Yes. Available on [oacfp.com](#) and [thebao.ca](#)

38. Are there concerns re-hydro aspirators that exhaust directly into flush basins or sinks resulting in effluent particles becoming airborne?

Yes. Refer to the [*Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) and [*Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting*](#) on the BAO website

Other Comments from Dr. Siu

Reusing N95 masks is not recommended unless proper precautionary measures are in place to do so.

Although it is a nice idea to have people sign an attendance book, it is not advisable to share pens and there will be a privacy issue attached to enforcing this idea and sharing this data.

COVID-19 is transmitted by droplet formation – not airborne. It enters your body via nose, mouth or eyes. If a disease is airborne, you should not be in the same room.

Do not share pens, do not share keyboards. Sanitize before and after using keyboards.

When transferring from a residence or nursing home, it is important to wear masks and disposable glove and gown.

VERY IMPORTANT – PLEASE REMEMBER THAT TESTING FOR COVID-19 IS A SELECTIVE PROCESS. THE NUMBERS WHICH WE READ MAY NOT REFLECT THE ACTUAL NUMBERS.