



June 17 Postmortem Specimens from Deceased with Known or Suspected COVID-19

COVID-19 (novel coronavirus official name), data, reports, and guidance via CDC and WHO

Threat Assessment

"Recommended Postmortem Specimens

Recommendations about the type of postmortem specimens to [collect](#) vary based on whether the case of COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed, as well as whether an autopsy is performed.

The following factors should be considered when determining if an autopsy will be performed for a deceased known or suspected COVID-19 case:

- Medicolegal jurisdiction
- Facility environmental controls
- Availability of recommended personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Family and cultural wishes

If an autopsy is performed for a suspected COVID-19 case, collection of the following postmortem specimens is recommended:

- Postmortem swab specimens for COVID-19 testing:
 - Upper respiratory tract swab: Nasopharyngeal Swab (NP swab)
 - Lower respiratory tract swab: Lung swab from each lung
- Separate swab specimens for testing of other respiratory pathogens and other postmortem testing, as indicated
- Formalin-fixed autopsy tissues from lung and upper airway

If an autopsy is NOT performed for a suspected COVID-19 case, collection of the following postmortem specimens is recommended:

- Postmortem Nasopharyngeal Swab (NP swab) specimen for COVID-19 testing
- Separate NP swab for testing of other respiratory pathogens

If an autopsy is performed for a confirmed COVID-19 case, collection of the following postmortem specimens should be considered:

- Postmortem swab specimens for testing of other respiratory pathogens,
- Other postmortem microbiologic and infectious disease testing, as indicated
- Formalin-fixed autopsy tissues from lung and upper airway

In addition to postmortem specimens, any remaining specimens (e.g., NP swab, sputum, serum, stool) that may have been collected prior to death should be retained. Please refer to [Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) for more information.

PPE Recommendations for NP Swab Collection

Since collection of nasopharyngeal swab specimens from deceased persons will not induce coughing or sneezing, NIOSH-approved disposable N-95 respirator or higher is not required if only a NP swab is being collected from the decedent.

The following PPE should be worn at a minimum:

- Wear non-sterile, nitrile, latex or rubber gloves when handling potentially infectious materials.
- If there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds, or other injuries that break the skin, wear heavy-duty gloves over the nitrile gloves.
- Wear a clean, long-sleeved fluid-resistant or impermeable hospital isolation gown to protect skin and clothing.
- Use 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.

[\(CDC\)](#)

Action Steps:

1. Surgical scrubs, shoe covers, and surgical cap should be used per routine protocols. [Doff \(take off\) PPE](#) carefully to avoid contaminating yourself and before leaving the autopsy suite or adjacent anteroom.

2. If the PPE supply is low, see [Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of PPE](#).

3. Please refer to [Interim Laboratory Biosafety Guidelines for Handling and Processing Specimens Associated with Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) for additional information.

[\(CDC\)](#)

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