

Statement of Coroners Service
from the Coroners Society of Ireland

Guidance in relation to the Coroners Service and Deaths
due to Covid-19 infection

The Coroners Service is responsible for the forensic and medico-legal investigation of certain categories of death in Ireland. The functions and role of the Coroner are set out in the **Coroners Act 1962-2019**. Novel Coronavirus (2019 nCov) is a notifiable Disease under the **Infectious Diseases (Amendment) Regulations 2020** and deaths due wholly or partly to a notifiable disease must be reported to the Coroner under **Schedule 2, paragraph 13 of the Act**. The following is a summary of the current situation in relation to this process of death investigation.

Confirmed and suspected or possible Covid-19 related deaths are reportable to the relevant District Coroner in every case.

There are a number of anticipated scenarios in which such reported deaths will arise and the following scenarios also align with the guidance for post mortem examinations issued by the **National Clinical Advisor and Group Lead for Acute Operations of the Health Service Executive** (10th March 2020).

1. Patient death with a confirmed *ante mortem* diagnosis of Covid-19

- a) Report the death to the District Coroner.
- b) In most cases a post mortem examination will not be required unless other circumstances are present and the law mandates an autopsy to be directed by the Coroner.

2. Patient death in hospital in the context of suspected Covid- 19, *ante mortem* viral swabs results awaited

- a) Report the death to the District Coroner.
- b) Await swab results.
- c) If positive for Covid-19, same as 1b above.
- d) If negative, proceed to post mortem examination if the Coroner so directs.

3. Patient death in hospital from respiratory failure/adult respiratory distress syndrome before investigation

- a) Report the death to the District Coroner.
- b) Post mortem viral swabs directed to be taken.
- c) Await results.
- d) If positive, same as 1b above.
- e) If negative, same as 2d above.

4. Death in the community with circumstantial suspicion for Covid-19 infection but no *ante mortem* investigation has been undertaken for Covid-19.

- a) Report the death to the District Coroner
- b) Transfer body to mortuary.
- c) Post mortem viral swabs directed to be taken.
- d) Await results.
- e) If positive, same as 1b above.
- f) If negative, same as 2d above.

Covid-19 is currently classified as a Biological Agent (Hazard Group 3) and the handling, transportation and viewing of the body of the deceased person should be in accordance with the relevant **Statutory Regulations** and the Guidelines from the **Health Service Executive and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre for Handling of Remains of 2013** (ISBN 978-0-9565622-1-0). Other relevant guidelines from the HSE on **Interim Infection Prevention and Control Precautions in Healthcare Settings** (v2.0 11.02.2020) should also be observed.

At the conclusion of the Coroner-directed viral screening or post mortem examination, the body will be released to the person entitled to possession under law (usually the family or next-of-kin) and funeral arrangements and interment or other arrangements are then a matter for the family and their funeral directors. The Coroners Service refers also to the **Briefing on COVID-19 published by the Royal College of Pathologists** (V1 February 2020) and to all advices issued by the HSE, HSPC, Public Health Specialists and other authorities with the relevant responsibilities. The Coroners Service will review this guidance as appropriate and required if and as further information becomes available.

Coroners Service / Coroners Society of Ireland.
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