



Western Cape  
Government

BETTER TOGETHER.

# PROVINCIAL GUIDE TO CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN MANAGING COVID-19 DEATHS

Department of Local Government

2 June 2020



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# **COVID-19 Death in a Government Facility**

**COVID- 19 Death:  
In Hospital/Ambulance**

**COVID-19 Death:  
In Isolation/Quarantine/Field  
Hospital**

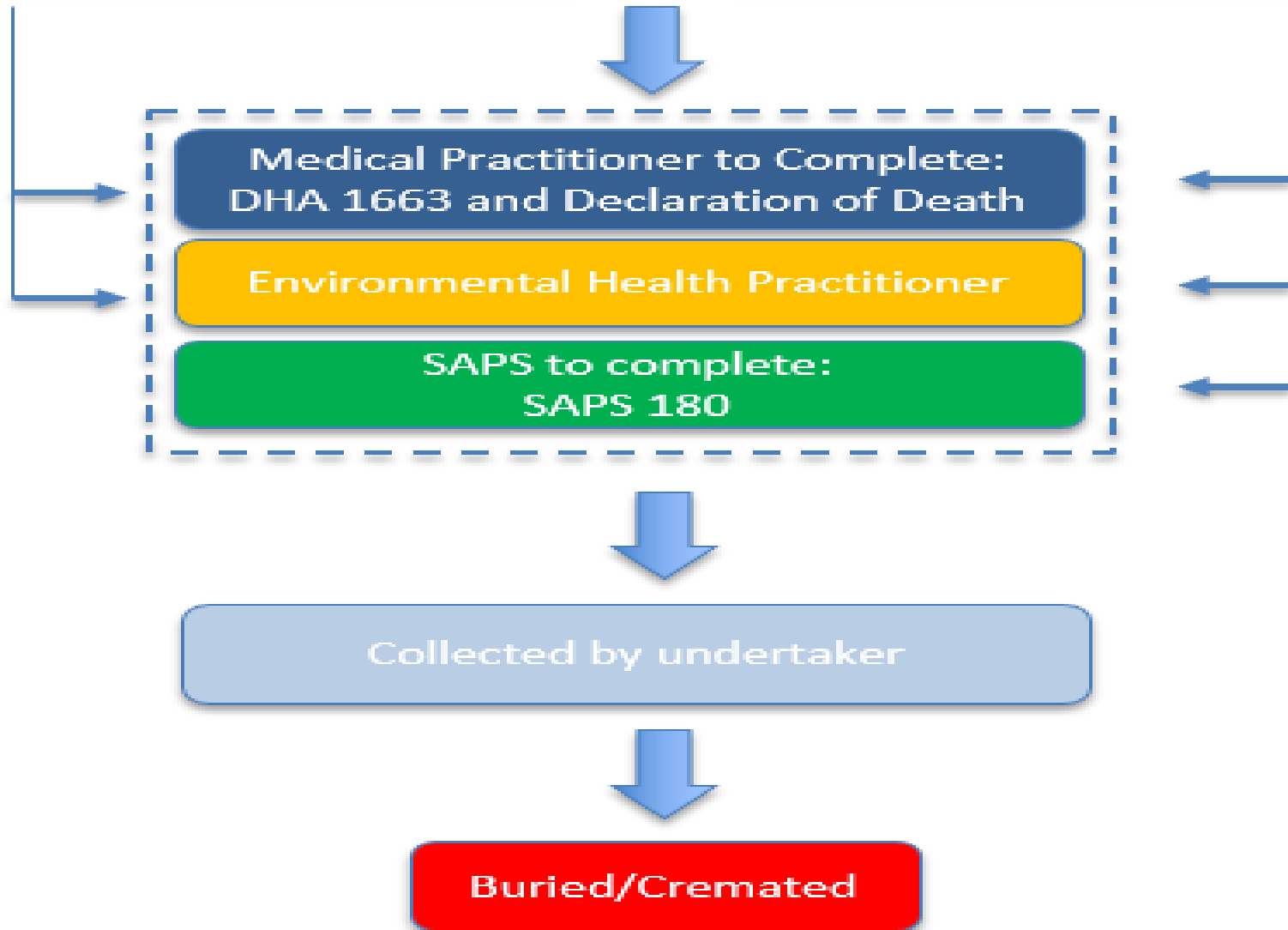
**Medical Practitioner to Complete:  
DHA 1663 and Declaration of Death**

**Environmental Health Practitioner**

**SAPS to complete:  
SAPS 180**

**Collected by undertaker**

**Buried/Cremated**





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# **COVID-19 Death in the Community (at home)**

**COVID-19 Death:  
In Community (Home)**



EMS to Complete:  
Declaration of Death  
and COVID-19 screening

SAPS to complete:  
SAPS 180

Environmental Health Practitioner



Collected by undertaker and obtain  
DHA 1663 from treating Doctor



Undertaker to register death at  
Home Affairs



**Buried/Cremated**

If **DHA 1663** not  
obtained - case  
referred to  
**Forensic  
Pathology  
Services** for  
further  
investigation



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# **COVID-19 Provincial Funeral Policy**

# The Legal Framework for managing COVID-19 Deaths

- On 15 March 2020, a National State of Disaster was declared to respond to the Covid-19 Virus.
- A range of Regulations and Directions were effected to respond to this world-wide pandemic.
- The management of fatalities, in particular, is governed by:
  - National Health Act 61 of 2003;
  - Regulations regarding the General Control of Human Bodies, Tissue, Blood Products and Gametes (as published in GNR 180 of 2 March 2012 in *Government Gazette* No. 35099);
  - Regulations Relating to the Management of Human Remains (as published in GNR363 of 22 May 2013 in *Government Gazette* No.36473);
  - The Health Directions issued by the Minister of Health in terms of regulation 10(1)(a) of the Disaster Management Regulations (see Government Notice No. 457 of 8 April 2020);
  - Guidelines for case-finding, diagnosis, management and public health response in South Africa;
  - COVID-19 Environmental Health Guidelines, dated 16 March 2020;
  - COVID-19 Environmental Health Response Guidelines, dated 27 March 2020; and
  - Environmental Health Guidelines for Management of Human Remains in the context of COVID-19, dated 27 March 2020.

# Handling of confirmed or suspected Covid-19 Decedents

## Handling of Human Remains - generally

- All persons handling COVID -19 human remains should:
  - wear suitable PPE
  - practice good personal hygiene
- The handling of human remains with bare hands including kissing is prohibited.

## Handling of Human Remains at Mortuaries or at Undertakers - Generally

- A body bag should be used for transferring the body to the mortuary (double bag)
- Those handling the body should use full PPE
- The outer surface of the body bag and trolley should be decontaminated immediately before the body bag leaves the ward
- Empty body bags should be treated or disposed of as health care risk waste.
- Prior to leaving the ward, staff members must remove their PPE (See para 8B of the Health Directions, as amended, as well as section 2 of the NDoH guidelines).
- **Municipalities should ensure that the burial or cremation of COVID-19 mortal remains takes place in suitably approved cemeteries and crematoria.** (Municipal function)



# Handling of Covid-19 Decedents (2)

## Viewing of the body

- Once in the hospital or private mortuary, the body bag may be opened for family viewing (one at a time) only (mortuary attendant to wear full PPE).
- Each family member is to be provided with a mask and gloves
- Kissing of the body prohibited.

## Preparation of the body

- Washing or preparing body is acceptable, must wear PPE - must be disposed immediately.
- Washing of the human remains can only be performed at the mortuary/ funeral undertaker's premises, no washing is allowed elsewhere.
- If the family wishes to dress the human remains, they may do so at the funeral undertaker's premises prior to the body being placed in the body bag.

## Post Mortem procedure

- Safe working techniques (for example manual rather than power tools) should be used.
- Full PPE must be worn.
- Embalming is not recommended to avoid excessive manipulation of the body, however, if embalming is undertaken, the embalmer should wear full PPE. (Above as per Section 2 of the NDoH guidelines)

# Measures when a patient passes away at home

**If a COVID-19 patient dies at home, family members may not handle the body.**

- A funeral undertaker must be called immediately.
- The belongings of the deceased person should be:
  - handled with gloves;
  - cleaned with a detergent; then
  - disinfected with a solution of at least 70% ethanol or 0.1% (1000 ppm) bleach.
- Guidelines on the handling and washing of clothing and other fabric belonging to the deceased is also provided for. (See paragraph 8C of the Health Directions, as amended, as well as, section 3 of the NDoH guidelines).

# Conveyance of Covid-19 Human Remains (1)

## Import / Export of Remains

- Paragraph 8A (1) of the Health Directions, as amended, provides that;
  - “The handling, **transportation, importation, exportation** and final disposal of COVID-19 mortal remains should be conducted only in accordance with chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the Human Remains Regulations.”
- Chapter 4 of the Human Remains Regulations sets out the process one must follow to import or export infectious human remains (this will include Covid-19 human remains).

# Conveyance of Covid-19 Human Remains (2)

## Movement of COVID-19 mortal remains between Provinces

- Regulation 33(4) (f) of the DM Regulations, as amended, provides for the:
  - “Movement of persons between provinces, metropolitan areas and districts and hotspots are prohibited, **except for-** (f) the **transportation of mortal remains.**
- Chapter 4 of the Human Remains Regulations will also be applicable for the transportation or movement of Covid-19 mortal remains between provinces.
- Reg 12 states that infectious mortal remains may not be conveyed in public in any way unless-
  - Properly packaged (requirements contained in regulation 12(1)(a));
  - Medical practitioner declares it safe to conveyance infectious human remains; and
  - Such declaration accompanies the human remains at all times.
- The DM Regulations, as amended, read with the National Health Directions, as amended and further read with Chapter 4 of the Human Remains Regulations, provides for the transportation of Covid-19 mortal remains between provinces.

**(Cross-Provincial MOU being developed)**

# Attendance of Funerals

## Traveling to attend a Funeral

- Movement between Provinces or Municipalities to attend a funeral is only permitted if:
  - spouse or partner of the deceased;
  - child of the deceased (biological, adopted or stepchild);
  - child-in-law of the deceased;
  - parent of the deceased (biological, adopted or stepparent);
  - sibling (biological, adopted or stepbrother or sister of the deceased); or
  - a grandparent of the deceased.
- Attendees travelling must obtain the required permit from his or her nearest magistrate's office or police station (where travelling between Districts, Metropolitan areas or between provinces)
- A person requesting a permit from the Police / Magistrate must produce a death certificate or a certified copy of the death certificate.
  - **Non COVID19 Related:** Only two attendees (may be family), with the required permits, may be present in the vehicle transporting the mortal remains. (declaration by a medical doctor required)
  - **COVID19 Related:** only undertakers may transport the body – with a declaration from the Medical Doctor
- **Regulation 35 of the DM Regulations, as amended on 28 May 2020, effective 1 June 2020**

# Attendance of Funerals (2)

## Funeral Proceedings

- Attendance at a funeral is limited to 50 people.
- Funeral services may be held at faith-based institutions provided:
  - Limited to 50 persons or less;
  - Health protocols and social distancing measures are adhered to;
- Social distancing to be observed.
- Night vigils is prohibited.
- During a funeral, all hygienic conditions and distancing measures must be adhered to.
- Only close family members should attend funeral services of persons that died of COVID-19 or other infectious diseases.

# Disposal of Human Remains – Burial Procedures

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- Cremation is highly recommended where the deceased has passed on due to COVID-19.
- Burial services should not exceed 2 hours to minimise possible exposure.
- Those tasked with placing the body in the grave, or on the funeral pyre, etc. should wear gloves and wash hands with soap and water once the burial is complete. (See paragraph 8G of the Health Directions as amended, as well as, section 7 of the NDoH Guidelines)

# Cultural and Religious Practices and Observances

- **Faith-based and Cultural Organizations were consulted prior to the completion of the document to make incorporate specific cultural and religious requirements.**
- **The following groups were consulted:**
  - Abathembu Traditional and Cultural Society of the Western Cape
  - Anglican diocese
  - Assemblies of God Association
  - Attakwa Traditional House
  - Baha'i
  - Baptist Church
  - Calvyn Protestant Church
  - Cape Town Interfaith Initiative
  - Church Without Walls Khayelitsha
  - Cochoqua Cultural Council
  - Concerned Clergy Network
  - Dutch Reformed Church
  - Dutch Reformed Church Western Cape
  - ELCSA Cape Church
  - Every Nation Cape Jewish Board of Deputies
  - Freedom of Religion South Africa
  - Full Gospel Church
  - Gonaqua Traditional House
  - Gorachouquas (Khoisan Indigenous Peoples org)
  - Goringhaicona Khoi-Khoisan Indigenous Traditional Council
  - Goringhaiqua Indigenous People's House
  - Great Commission Network
  - Griqua National Conference of SA
  - Hessequa Traditional House
  - Hindu Cultural Society
  - Home of Compassion
  - Iga! Ne Trust Traditional House
  - Khoesan Indigenous Women in Action
  - Khowesan Gaes
  - Langeberg Khoisan First Nation
  - Lutheran Church Cape Synod
  - Methodist Church Cape Synod
  - Muslim Judicial Council (MJC)
  - National Griqua Cultural Council
  - National House of Traditional Leaders
  - Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa (Hervormde Kerk) Cape Town
  - Presbyterian Church
  - Roman Catholic Diocese
  - Shofar Christian Church
  - The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa Western Cape
  - Union of Orthodox Synagogues Cape Council
  - United Reformed Church Cape Province
  - Western Cape Ecumenical Network
  - Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum
  - Western Cape Traditional Leaders
  - Western Province Council of Churches



# Cultural and Religious Practices and Observances (3)

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- **It further deals with:**
  - Cleansing Rituals.
  - Safe handling, including appropriate PPE
  - Internment (Pre-burial and Burial procedures), and
  - Documentation and traceability, including data management.

# Example: Special Cultural Provisions

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## Islam

- Ritual purification of the deceased's body, by four (4) registered and trained members in full PPE.
- Includes disinfection of the body, washing facility, bier and hearse according to NDoH Guidelines.
- In addition to the required wrapping of the body in a Kafan (white cotton shroud), the Mayit (deceased) will also be placed in two plastic body bags.
- All cotton, cloths, swabs and the deceased's clothing, which was worn before passing, will be discarded as medical waste.
- The Janaza Salaah may be performed at the Maqbara as all Masaajid are closed for the duration of the lockdown.
- The deceased must be lowered into the grave by a maximum of three (3) people in full PPE.
- Strictly no cremation.



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**Thank You**