



GOVERNMENT OF KERALA

Abstract

Local Self Government Department- COVID-19: Standard Operating Procedure on Dead Body Management and guidelines for relatives of the deceased and Local Bodies in the State - Orders issued.

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT (DC) DEPARTMENT

G.O.(Rt)No.1903/2020/LSGD Dated,Thiruvananthapuram, 14/10/2020

ORDER

Government are pleased to issue Standard Operating Procedure on Dead Body Management and Guidelines for Local Self Governments and for relatives of the deceased due to COVID-19, appended to this order

(By order of the Governor)

**SARADA MURALEEDHARAN IAS
PRINCIPAL SECRETARY**

To:

The Principal Director, Local self Government Department
The Director of Urban Affairs
The Director of Panchayat
The Director of Health Service
All District Collectors
The Secretaries of all Panchayats (through Director of Panchayat)
The Secretaries of all Urban Local Bodies (through Director of Urban Affairs)
Principal Secretary Health
Chief Secretary
The Principal Accountant General (A&E), Kerala Thiruvananthapuram.
The Accountant General ((G&SSA/(E&RSA) Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.
The Information Officer, I&PRD (Web & New Media)
The Executive Director, Information Kerala Mission.
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Date: 2020.10.15 13:52:04 IST
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Section Officer

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Private Secretary to Hon'ble Minster for LSGD

PA to Principal Secretary, LSGD
PA to Principal Secretary, H&FWD
CA to Special Secretary, LSGD

COVID-19: SOP ON DEAD BODY MANAGEMENT- GUIDELINES FOR RELATIVES OF THE DECEASED AND LOCAL BODIES IN KERALA

Scope

Recently there have been cases of Covid-19 positive death reported in Kerala, where the relatives were reluctant to receive the body for cremation forcing the local administration to perform the last rites. In some cases, the relatives were willing to take the body for cremation but the funeral of the deceased COVID patient had to be postponed following protests by locals against the cremation in their area. If the relatives are reluctant to take the body of the deceased for cremation, the Municipal/Panchayat administration is bound to come forward to perform the last rites. As per Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994 and the Kerala Municipal Act,1994 it is the duty of the Secretary of the concerned LSG to arrange for the disposal of unclaimed dead bodies found within its jurisdiction, the expenditure for which can be borne from the LSG Fund.

No guidelines have been issued so far regarding unconfirmed cases of Covid-19 deaths at hospitals and residences, but this has also become a concern in Kerala since many cases are detected posthumously. In these circumstances, it is found necessary to formulate guidelines by compiling the directions issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on Covid-19 dead body management and standard precautions to be followed by the relatives and municipal health workers while handling dead bodies of Covid-19.

Transportation from hospital/mortuary

The body, secured in a body bag, exterior of which is decontaminated poses no additional risk to the staff transporting the dead body, can be handed over to the relatives with intimation to the local body to which the deceased belongs and relatives shall receive and transport it. In case of relatives not willing to receive the body, it becomes the responsibility of the local body to ensure safe handling, transportation and cremation of the body. The personnel handling the body may follow standard precautions (surgical mask, gloves) as per health protocol. The vehicle, which is ideally an ambulance or a fully covered vehicle

with proper separation of the driver cabin from the rest of the vehicle, after the transfer of the body to cremation/ burial staff, will be decontaminated with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite under supervision of the health staff.

Burial/ cremation by family members

The main driver of transmission of COVID-19 is droplets. There is an increased risk of COVID infection from a dead body to family members who fail to follow the standard precautions during last rites of the deceased. Standard infection prevention control practices should be followed at all times. These include, hand hygiene, use of personal protective equipment (e.g., water resistant apron, gloves, masks, eyewear), safe handling of bag housing dead body, training in infection and prevention control practices of all relatives, municipal health and sanitation staff identified to handle dead bodies for cremation.

Family and friends may view the body after it has been prepared for burial, in accordance with customs. Body should not be taken out for purpose of bathing/ viewing or placing in ice box etc. They should not touch or kiss the body and should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water following the viewing; physical distancing measures should be strictly applied (at least 1 m between people). Number of people attending the funeral should be strictly restricted as per the Government regulations in force at the time. Those tasked with placing the body in the grave, on the funeral pyre, etc. should wear PPE as per health protocol and wash hands with soap and water once the burial is complete; Cleaning of reusable PPE should be conducted in accordance with manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g. concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). Children, persons above 60 years, and immunosuppressed persons should not directly interact with the body.

Although burials should take place in a timely manner in public/private graveyard or crematorium (or family burial ground if it is having facilities for safe burial/ cremation as per protocol to the satisfaction of health staff of the local body), post funeral ceremonies not involving the burial should be postponed, as much as possible, until the end of the epidemic. If a ceremony is held, the number of participants should be limited. Participants should observe physical distancing at all times, plus respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene; It is not compulsory that the belongings of the deceased person are be burned or

otherwise disposed off. However, they should be handled with gloves and cleaned with a detergent followed by disinfection with a solution of at least 70% ethanol or 0.1% (1000 ppm) bleach, and Clothing and other fabric belonging to the deceased should be machine washed with warm water at 60–90°C (140–194°F) and laundry detergent. If machine washing is not possible, linens can be soaked in hot water and soap in a large drum using a stick to stir and being careful to avoid splashing. The drum should then be emptied, and the linens soaked in 0.05% chlorine for approximately 30 minutes. Finally, the laundry should be rinsed with clean water and the linens allowed to dry fully in sunlight.

WHO guidelines state that ‘there is unlikely to be an increased risk of COVID infection from a dead body to health workers or family members who follow standard preparations. This applies to staff at the crematorium or burial ground too.

The Crematorium/ burial Ground staff (list of persons, their duty list, off days all to be properly maintained) should be sensitized that COVID 19 does not pose additional risk. The staff will practice standard precautions of hand hygiene, use of masks and gloves. Viewing of the dead body by unzipping the face end of the body bag (by the staff using standard precautions) maybe allowed, for the relatives to see the body for one last time.

Religious rituals such as reading from religious scripts, sprinkling holy water and any other last rites that does not require touching of the body can be allowed. Bathing, kissing, hugging, etc. of the dead body should not be allowed. The cremation and burial should be done as per the protocol issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The funeral/ burial staff and family members should perform hand hygiene after cremation/ burial. The ash does not pose any risk and can be collected to perform the last rites. Large gathering at the crematorium/ burial ground should be avoided as a social distancing measure as it is possible that close family contacts may be symptomatic and/or shedding the virus.

Burial by the Municipal /Panchayat Authorities

The body of a COVID-19 positive/suspect patient be sent to mortuary within 2 hours of death in hospital. If no family member or relative gets in touch with mortuary or is reluctant to receive the body in 12 hours, the hospital authorities shall send an intimation to the municipal authorities through the SHO regarding the cremation/burial. When the relatives are reluctant to take the bodies for cremation or in case of unclaimed bodies, LSGs shall make all the arrangements to cremate/bury such dead bodies as per the protocol issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The local authorities may fix the date and time of the funeral and an intimation may be sent to the relatives so that they can attend the funeral. Body should be cremated as per rituals of the religion concerned, as much as possible. Standard infection prevention control practices should be followed at all times. The staff will practice standard precautions of hand hygiene, use of masks and gloves. The municipal staff those tasked with placing the body in the grave, on the funeral should wear gloves and wash hands with soap and water once the burial is complete.

The expenses of the removal and disposal of body shall be borne by the LSG; but such expenses may be recovered as if it were a tax due to the local authority from any person who would have been legally liable therefor but for such removal and disposal, unless in the opinion of the local authority, he is too poor to do so.

In case of deaths at home, the local body shall be intimated and they will monitor that the family is maintaining a list of those who participate in the rituals. Relatives can proceed with the burial/cremation procedures. Large gatherings shall be avoided. Documents pertaining to death and treatment should be maintained for future reference if necessary.