

Testing Decedents for COVID-19

04/01/2022

People who have signs and symptoms consistent with COVID-19 may die for a variety of reasons prior to being tested for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has worked with medical examiners, coroners, and morticians to provide post-mortem SARS-CoV-2 testing supplies by request, as outlined by [CDC: Collection and Submission of Postmortem Specimens from Deceased Persons with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html).

This guidance is intended for morticians, funeral homes, and crematories and provides instructions on how to request supplies from MDH and administer COVID-19 tests to decedents. Questions about this guidance can be directed to Health.Mortsci@state.mn.us.

Requesting COVID-19 specimen collection supplies for a decedent

If a decedent is suspected to have died of COVID-19, a funeral home can request COVID-19 specimen collection supplies from MDH. Decedents tested for COVID-19 should not be embalmed or have their nasopharyngeal passages disinfected prior to specimen collection.

- Funeral homes can request COVID-19 test supplies for decedents by contacting Leslie.kollmann@state.mn.us at MDH. MDH will provide specimen collection supplies and guidance on specimen collection and will coordinate return shipping or specimen pick-up.
- Permission from the family must be obtained prior to requesting specimen collection supplies.
- Have the following information ready prior to requesting specimen collection supplies:
 - Name of the decedent.
 - Date of death.
 - Point of contact for the family, including name, relationship to the decedent, and phone number.
 - Point of contact for the funeral home, including name, and phone number.

If MDH is notified of a possible COVID-19 death that is without a recent positive test, the funeral home may receive a phone call from MDH regarding obtaining a sample from the decedent.

Collecting a COVID-19 respiratory specimen

Morticians who are collecting specimens for COVID-19 testing should use appropriate personal protective equipment (double gloves, fluid resistant gown; plastic face shield or face mask; and goggles) to minimize

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exposure to infectious bodily fluids. Samples must be collected by a licensed mortician; MDH staff is not able to collect the sample from the decedent.

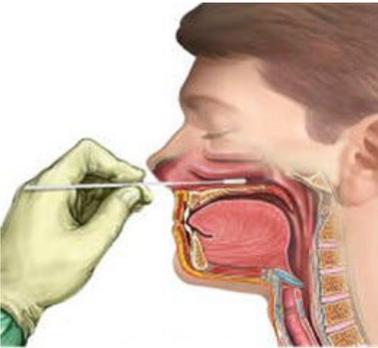
Specimens may be collected at any time post-mortem, regardless of the extent of body decomposition, as long as they are collected prior to embalming or disinfection of the head or nasopharyngeal passages.

Please collect the specimens for COVID-19 testing before:

- Embalming the body.
- Disinfecting the decedent's head or nasopharyngeal passages.

Collecting a postmortem nasopharyngeal (NP) swab

1. Put on appropriate personal protective equipment (gloves, gown, face shield or face mask).
2. Label the tube with the decedent's name and date of birth.
3. There is one long swab. Choose a nostril and insert parallel to the palate (see image below). You should stop when you feel resistance – usually about halfway between the nose and the start of the ear.



4. Let the swab sit for a few seconds.
5. Remove the swab from the nostril and place it into the tube with the pink or clear liquid (viral transport medium).
6. You will notice that the swab has a small perforation about halfway up the stick. Break off the top portion of the swabs at this perforation.
7. Close the lid of the tube. It is a tight fit, so you will need to screw the lid on with a bit of pressure.
8. Label the tube with the name, date of birth of the person being swabbed and the current date.
9. Place the tube into the bag.
10. Remove personal protective equipment and perform good hand hygiene.
11. Return specimen to MDH as directed.



Minnesota Department of Health | health.mn.gov | 651-201-5000
625 Robert Street North PO Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

Contact health.communications@state.mn.us to request an alternate format.