



# County of Bucks

## OFFICE OF THE CORONER

### Bucks County, Pennsylvania

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**Meredith J. Buck, Coroner**

March 20, 2020

Re: Coroner Office Operations in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Funeral Directors,

This is being sent to advise you of the response of the Bucks County Coroner Office (BCCO) to the current COVID-19 (Corona Virus) pandemic. In this notice, I will also share information on the steps that we have implemented to protect the health of our personnel and visitors to our facilities.

#### **Guidance for handling the Remains of COVID-19 Victims**

This issue has been discussed frequently within the BCCO along with extensive review of the recommendations. The United States Department of Labor, Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), has released guidelines for safely handling the human remains of victims who have died from COVID-19. These guidelines are for "deathcare" workers (i.e. workers involved in the handling of decedent remains) which include coroners, medical examiners, autopsy technicians, funeral directors, and other mortuary workers. The CDC and OSHA are recommending that deathcare workers use a combination of standard precautions, contact precautions, airborne precautions and eye protection when handling the remains of individuals suspected or confirmed of having COVID-19 related illness.

The BCCO has been using the guidance provided by OSHA. I strongly encourage that all funeral homes review the information on the website and take appropriate measures to protect their employees. Website: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html>.

Some of the recommendations listed that we are following include:

- Judicious use of personal protective equipment PPE such as gloves, gowns, eyewear protection, and/or face shields. N-95 facemasks are worn when doing procedures that have a risk for aerosolization of biologic material.
- N-95 masks are not being used for routine procedures with no aerosolization.
- Limit the number of personnel having contact with COVID-19 victims.
- Autopsies will not be performed on patients with confirmed/suspected COVID-19 infections. **(We recommend that remains of COVID-19 victims be cremated and manipulation of the decedent be kept to a minimum).**

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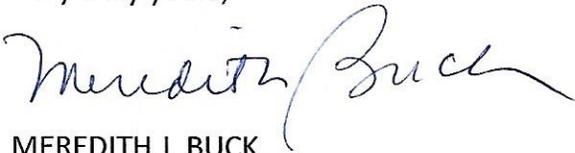
**State of Emergency Notification and BCCO**

On March 6, 2020 Governor Wolf signed an emergency disaster declaration for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. At this present time our office building will remain open. All BCCO operations including death investigations, post mortem examinations, release of decedents, cremation approvals and completion of death certificates will continue. We have been told that the EDRS system must be used for any known or suspected COVID-19 death. will be moving to the EDRS system for new cases; if you are not using EDRS, you will continue to receive death certificates as before. Please be advised of the following:

1. BCCO **will not** accept jurisdiction for confirmed COVID-19 victims that expire in a medical institution, they will be released directly to a funeral home.
2. Autopsies **will not** be performed on any individual with confirmed COVID-19 infection.
3. Individuals expiring at home with reported information that is **highly suspicious for being flu-related disease** such as active illness with high fever, malaise, recent travel history or sick contacts will be accepted as a coroner case.
  - a. The post mortem examination, if one is planned, will be delayed until the results of the preliminary viral testing is received.
  - b. Direct cremation may be advisable in possible infectious disease cases.

We are currently exploring options for increasing refrigerated storage to accommodate a potential surge of decedents due to COVID-19 infection and will notify funeral homes if we intend to temporarily store decedents at a secondary site. As the current COVID-19 epidemic/pandemic evolves we will continue to re-evaluate our operations and send updates with any changes. Should you need any information regarding the COVID-19 activities in Bucks County please visit the website at <https://covid19-bucksgis.hub.arcgis.com/>.

Very truly yours,



MEREDITH J. BUCK,  
Bucks County Coroner