

## COVID-19 ADVISORY FOR NEW JERSEY CEMETERIES AND MORTUARIES

**The drastic increase in the State's mortality rate due to the COVID-19 emergency is currently straining the entire post-mortem management system.**

In response, Judith Persichilli, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Health, signed [Executive Directive 20-010](#) ("Directive") to provide much-needed coordination and support to healthcare facilities and death care entities in the managing of human remains. The New Jersey Cemetery Board and Mortuary Science Board together issue this guidance to summarize the Commissioner's Directive and to assist licensees in complying with temporary regulatory changes.

**The primary objective of the Directive and this guidance is to expedite the disposition of human remains during the COVID-19 emergency.**

The Division of Consumer Affairs greatly appreciates all licensees who are doing their best to respond to the unprecedented demand for funeral and disposition services. The safety and well-being of all citizens is the Division's highest priority. If you have any questions, please contact Quin Archer at [Archerq@dca.njoag.gov](mailto:Archerq@dca.njoag.gov).

### FUNERAL SERVICES & MORTUARY CARE

- **Limited Gatherings - 10 persons or fewer.** All Board licensees must comply with Governor Murphy's limitations on public gatherings and limitations on person-to-person contact as ordered in [Executive Order 107](#) and the Office of Emergency Management's [Administrative Order 2020-4](#).
- **Services May Not Be Denied Based on Cause of Death.** Licensees are reminded they may not deny or place conditions on providing services based solely upon a decedent's cause of death, **including unjustifiably increasing prices.**
- **Encourage Closed Casket Services.** The Directive prohibits in-person open casket viewings. The Board clarified with DOH/OCSME that a brief, open-casket identification is allowed but that a traditional, public, open-casket viewing is not. Closed-casket services are encouraged. **Licensees must ensure mourners comply with limited gathering requirements above.**
- **No Storing of Human Remains for Future Memorialization.** The Directive states that in general, a mortuary should provide for

disposition within 7 days of death. To clarify, licensees are expected to make a good faith effort to expedite final dispositions. Factors causing delays should be reported weekly in the situational awareness surveys (see below). The religious, cultural, and individual beliefs of decedents shall be considered to the extent possible.

- **Embalming is Strongly Discouraged.** The [World Health Organization](#) does not recommend embalming remains of persons who have died with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Embalming may be performed when necessary as determined by mortuary practitioners (e.g., for entombment) and if appropriate personal protective equipment is utilized.
- **Required Signatures Can Be Electronic.** [Executive Order 112](#) now permits signature requirements for prepaid and at-need funeral arrangements to be satisfied electronically.
- **Personal Protective Equipment.** All persons involved in handling remains – regardless of the known or suspected cause of death – should wear appropriate personal protective equipment and adhere to [Standard Precautions](#).

### DISPOSITIONS

- **Final Disposition by Direct Cremation/Immediate Burial.** Disposition of remains should be by direct cremation or immediate burial/entombment, regardless of cause of death.
- **Registered Interns May Witness Disposition.** N.J.A.C. 13:36-8.10 has been modified to allow a Registered Intern, at the discretion and under the direction of their established Preceptor, to be present at final disposition of remains in lieu of a licensed practitioner. Interns must always carry their Intern Identification Card when performing tasks outside mortuary premises and display credentials upon request. Preceptors remain responsible for the actions of the Registered Interns.
- **Mortuaries Must Utilize Crematories Throughout the State.** Crematories in the northern region of the state have been overwhelmed by the increased demand for cremation services. **Mortuaries and crematories throughout the State must coordinate to provide timely disposition of remains.**

## ALLEVIATING DELAYS AND BACKUPS

- **Expanded Operations.** *All mortuaries, cemeteries and crematories* must safely maximize hours of operation in response to the increased demand for funeral and disposition services, *including expanded daily, weekend and holiday operating hours.*

The Department of Environmental Protection [extended daily operating limits](#) in air permits governing human crematories in the State. Crematory operators must still comply with all other conditions in their permits.

Hospitals must provide 24-hour access to their morgues for the removal of human remains, inclusive of holidays.

- **Reciprocal Services Arrangements.** All mortuaries must identify and contact at least one Reciprocal Services Mortuary - a registered mortuary in another county to which a case can be referred when the referring mortuary is unable to timely provide services. All mortuaries are advised to identify and utilize more than one RSM as different regions in the State experience spikes in demand.
- **Timing to Exercise Right to Control.** The *right to control funeral and disposition must be exercised within a shortened period of time* unless the Medical Examiner is required to investigate the death. Remains at hospitals must be removed within 48 hours and remains at residential healthcare facilities within 12 hours.
- **Temporary Morgues.** The Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner has established [temporary morgues](#) to be used by hospitals,

residential healthcare facilities and mortuaries under certain circumstances.

Temporary Morgues are operational in the northern and central regions of the state. Licensees may only utilize the Temporary Morgue designated for the catchment area within which they are located. See below for the Catchment Areas and contact information.

### ***Transportation to/from Temporary Morgues is the responsibility of the transferring entity***

Non-emergency medical transport vehicles may be used for transport. The transferring entity must ensure remains are properly secured and that the vehicle is appropriately disinfected following transport.

### **Transfer of Remains to Temporary Morgues - When Permitted**

- **Hospitals.** If remains are not removed within 48 hours of death and the hospital is unable to safely store the remains, the hospital may transport the remains to its designated temporary morgue.
- **Mortuaries.** If unable to timely remove remains at the request of the next-of-kin, *and after confirming that an RSM is also unable to timely take custody of the remains,* a mortuary may transport remains to its designated temporary morgue. Mortuaries are urged to document their contact with an RSM and its response in the decedent's record.
- **Residential Healthcare Facilities.** If remains are not removed within 12 hours of the death, and the facility is unable to safely

store remains, the facility may transport the remains to its designated temporary morgue.

## **COVID-19 SITUATIONAL AWARENESS SURVEY**

In accordance with the Directive, the Division of Consumer Affairs is collecting information regarding the situational and projected postmortem management capacity of all licensees during the emergency. Licensees are required to provide this information in furtherance of the State's coordinated response.

### **Survey Details:**

- Licensees must complete the survey every week until further notice.
- Survey responses must be completed by noon on Mondays.
- Responses to survey questions should reflect licensee experiences during the preceding week.

A link to the survey can be found on the Mortuary Science and Cemetery Board websites as well as below:

[COVID-19 Survey – Funeral Homes](#)

[COVID-19 Survey – Cemeteries](#)

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### **Additional Industry Information:**

[New Jersey State Funeral Directors Association](#)

[New Jersey Cemetery Association](#)

[NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Resources](#)

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*Transportation to and from Temporary Morgues is the responsibility of the transferring entity*

### OCSME Catchment Areas by County

#### Northern Catchment Area

[Morgue-north@gw.njsp.org](mailto:Morgue-north@gw.njsp.org)  
(phone: 609-433-4117)

Bergen, Essex,  
Hudson  
Passaic, Morris, Sussex  
Warren

#### Central Catchment Area

[Morgue-central@gw.njsp.org](mailto:Morgue-central@gw.njsp.org)  
(phone: 609-433-0641)

Hunterdon, Mercer,  
Middlesex  
Monmouth, Ocean,  
Somerset  
Union

#### Southern Catchment Area

[Morgue-south@gw.njsp.org](mailto:Morgue-south@gw.njsp.org)  
(phone: 609-433-4184)

Atlantic, Burlington,  
Camden  
Cape May, Cumberland,  
Gloucester  
Salem

### CHECKLIST FOR TRANSFERS TO TEMPORARY MORGUES

- \_\_\_ **Confirm that no Reciprocal Services Mortuary can take custody of the remains.**  
Document contacted RSMs in decedent's record.
- \_\_\_ **Contact the Temporary Morgue to schedule a transfer.**
- \_\_\_ **Complete the [Decedent Transfer Authorization Form](#).** Require any third-party transporter to return a copy of the form once remains have been acknowledged received at the Temporary Morgue. ***Retain a copy of the fully executed form in the decedent's record.***
- \_\_\_ **Prepare Remains for Transport.** Place remains into polyvinyl, zippered pouches and externally wiped down with EPA-approved viricide.
- \_\_\_ **Record the identification information** in the decedent's record, including a digital photograph whenever possible.
- \_\_\_ **Include the [DOH Communicable Disease Alert Form](#)** with remains if cause of death known or reasonably suspected to be related to COVID-19 or other contagious disease.