



Fact sheet - COVID-19 Guidance for using human remains for teaching, scientific and research purposes

16/09/2020

This fact sheet provides information and advice for using human remains with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 for teaching, scientific and research purposes.

For general guidance on bringing human remains into Australia, visit the Department of Health's [website](#).

When drafting required statements to send with human remains into Australia, consider COVID-19 infection risks.

Guidance for the use of Class 2 human remains in relation to COVID-19 risk

Human remains used for teaching and training purposes should be:

- from those who died in November 2019 or before, or
- from persons who had a confirmed negative COVID-19 test at death per the [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units](#), or
- embalmed prior to importation.

Standard precautions to manage the biosecurity risk of human remains which meet the above measures are:

- Handle human remains using standard precautions within the [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare](#)
- Practise thorough hand hygiene using soap and water after interacting with the body or body parts
- Undertake all aerosol generating procedures using contact and airborne precautions with eye protection (e.g. goggles or a face shield)
- Clean frequently touched surfaces often or when visibly soiled in addition to routine cleaning. Use disinfectant wipes or a detergent product, with a one-use or laundry safe cloth.

Using human remains with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 or where COVID-19 risk is likely to be present

Human remains with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 prior to death, or where COVID-19 risk is likely (e.g. sourced from countries with high COVID-19 incidence), presents a risk of infection for those who handle the remains. This can be through respiratory secretions, excretions and aerosol generating procedures.

It is recommended that these remains are not used for teaching or training purposes.

If using the remains for other scientific and research purposes follow the below to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection:

- Conduct a risk assessment to identify hazards and manage risks of the activity by using personal protective equipment (PPE) and other measures
- Only people with appropriate infection prevention and control training should handle human remains. This includes using standard precautions (gloves, waterproof disposable gown, surgical mask and eye protection)
 - Further guidance on handling COVID-19 infected remains is in the Department of Health website information sheet [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – Advice for funeral directors](#)
- Place a surgical mask over the deceased's mouth and nose to prevent risk of aerosol generation, especially when moving the body
- Adults over 60 years and people with a weak or suppressed immune system should not interact with the body
- Practice thorough hand hygiene using soap and water after interacting with the body or body parts
- Avoid all aerosol generating procedures or undertake using contact and airborne precautions with eye protection (e.g. goggles or a face shield)
- Use contact and airborne precautions with eye protection when manipulating lungs or performing invasive procedures. Complete this in line with existing guidelines for any autopsies of people who have died from an acute respiratory illness
- When cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, use water and soap (or a detergent solution). Then apply a Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) listed disinfectant with claim of activity against enveloped viruses.

Fluid, cell or tissue-level work

Isolating fluids, cells or tissues from remains with COVID-19 risk is not recommended. However, if required, follow the below guidance.

Ensure the relevant state, territory or a human biosecurity officer (HBO) has not prohibited the isolation of fluids, cells or tissues from remains with COVID-19 infection risk.

Carry out a risk assessment and develop mitigation strategies to manage risks, before commencing work.

Depending on sample type and procedure, handle all suspected or confirmed COVID-19 material in a Physical Containment (PC), Level 2 (PC2), or PC Level 3 (PC3) laboratory. Follow all state and territory requirements for this type of work, including for isolating materials from human remains.

The main points to note are:

- Handle isolated human tissues, cells and fluids in at least a PC2 facility using standard precautions for work not involving viral propagation
- Conduct work relating to isolating viruses in cell culture or isolated SARS-CoV-2, the infective agent of COVID-19, in a PC3 facility. Use PC3 work practices as recommended under the Australian/New Zealand Standard Safety in laboratories Part 3: Microbiological safety and containment (AS/NZS 2243.3:2010). Manage the handling or manipulating of viruses in a Class II Biological safety cabinet (BSC).

Experienced personnel must conduct this work.

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides interim guidance on [laboratory biosafety practices for COVID-19](#).

Further information

Australian Government Department of Health's [human remains information](#)

[Contact details](#) for each state or territory health departments

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's [requirements of importing human fluids, cells and tissues \(BICON system\)](#)