

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Reporting and Clean-up when Death Occurs at Home

This guidance provides recommendations on the cleaning and disinfecting of homes where someone has died, and the death is known or suspected to have been the result of COVID-19.

This is clearly a difficult task for anyone who shared a home with the deceased. It calls for attention to detail and careful compliance with best practice guidelines to assure that the home is made safe for other residents. It also requires careful compliance to assure the safety of the cleaner. In addition, though, this task may carry a lot of emotional weight for the cleaner, who will certainly need to handle items that belonged to the deceased and may also have to confront the physical signs that mark the room or area as a death scene.

This guidance starts with a brief outline of steps you will need to take when death has occurred, and then goes on to detail the clean-up process.

### WHEN SOMEONE DIES OF COVID-19 AT HOME: FIRST STEPS

#### Plan ahead

If you are providing care for someone who is seriously ill with COVID-19, especially if they are elderly or have a chronic condition that places them at high risk, it makes sense to plan in advance for the possibility of their death. You should:

- Talk to their health care provider about the steps you will need to follow;
- Identify a funeral home or mortuary you will be using and make plans for cremation or burial, depending on personal and family preferences and religious customs.

#### At the time of death

When death occurs, it is important that you maintain the prevention practices you've had in place while caring for the deceased.

- Other household members should stay away from the sickroom. In other circumstances, families often choose to gather at the bedside when a loved one dies. With COVID-19, sadly, the risk of infection makes that impossible.
- You yourself should leave the room right away, taking care to avoid touching the body or anything else in the room. It may be difficult not to linger, but it is important to leave the sickroom promptly both to protect your own health and to make things easy for first responders who will come to your home to certify the death.
- Be sure to remove the PPE you have been wearing immediately upon exiting the room. Clean your hands either by washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. The sanitizer must contain at least 60% alcohol to be effective as an alternative to soap and water. If the hands are visibility soiled, soap and water is the right choice.

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### Report the death and then take time for comfort

Make sure that someone in the household calls 911 as soon as possible to report the death.

- This may be another household member or you, as soon as you have removed your PPE and cleaned your hands.
- Whoever calls should tell the dispatcher that the deceased had been ill with COVID-19.
- 911 will dispatch first responders, who may include police and fire personnel. They will assess the scene and may contact the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner-Coroner. You will be told whether your loved one may be released to a funeral home or mortuary or if the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner-Coroner will be taking jurisdiction.
- If they release the body, you can contact your chosen funeral home or mortuary to come to your home to pick up the body. If you have not chosen a funeral home or mortuary in advance, you should try to identify one as soon as possible
- If the first responders determine that review by the Medical Examiner is needed, the body may be transported by the ME's office.

Once the first responders have left and a plan for removal of the body is in place, you can take time to be with other household members.

- While current social (physical) distancing orders make it impossible to invite others who live outside your household to join you, you certainly can call family or friends or bring people together via online connection.
- You may also want to contact a member of the clergy who can provide comfort by telephone or Internet.
- There is no need to start on clean-up yet. Even after the body is removed it is a good idea to delay clean-up for at least 24 hours so the sickroom or space that served as your sick room can air out.
  - If, however, you are going to need professional help in the clean-up process (see next section) you may want to make those arrangements right away.

### CLEANING THE SPACE

Once the funeral home or Medical Examiner's team has removed the deceased from your home, clean-up can begin. Again, note that it is ideal to delay for a day before beginning this process.

- If the area or room in which the person died is very compromised – if the body remained there for some time after death or the area is contaminated by body fluids -- a professional cleaner with training and equipment to handle contaminated items is needed. You can find a cleaner who is trained to deal with biohazards at <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DRSEM/Pages/EMB/MedicalWaste/Trauma-Scene.aspx2>

After the body is gone and biohazards have been dealt with by professionals, the general clean-up can begin.

- If your family has the means and you do not want to handle the clean-up while dealing with your loss, it may make sense to hire a professional cleaner to do the job for you.
- Whether you hire someone to clean or do it yourself, it must be done thoroughly and carefully with appropriate cleaning products and with the cleaner protected with appropriate PPE.

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- Clean-up must include the isolated living space in which the deceased was cared for, the bathroom they used, and their linens, clothing, and other items. Both personal items and items the deceased used in common with the rest of the household should be cleaned and disinfected.

### Products to use for cleaning and disinfecting

Cleaning and disinfecting are two separate steps in the clean-up process.

- Cleaning is aimed at removing germs (including viruses), dirt and impurities from surfaces. Cleaning doesn't kill germs, but it reduces risk of infection by reducing the number of germs on the surface.
- Disinfecting, on the other hand, doesn't necessarily make the surface look clean, but it does reduce risk of infection by killing germs on the surface. The stronger the disinfectant and the longer it stays on the surface the more germs it will kill.

For cleaning:

- Warm water and soap are effective for cleaning. They remove germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces.
- If you don't have soap, use another detergent with water.

For disinfecting:

- Use a commercial EPA-registered disinfectant if one is available,
- An alternative is a bleach solution: 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water.
- Alcohol is an effective alternative when another disinfectant is not available.
- Disinfecting sprays and household bleach solutions should be allowed to sit and coat the surface according to the label instructions on the chemical.

Safe use of cleaning and disinfecting products

- Check the labels on your product. **Never** mix bleach or any product containing bleach with any product containing **ammonia**, as the gas produced is extremely harmful.
- Cleaning products should be stored out of reach of children and pets to avoid ingestion/poisoning.
- When using cleaning products, open a window if weather permits, to let fumes dissipate.
- Take care to protect yourself – see guidance on use of PPE in the next section.

### Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)

You will need appropriate PPE to avoid infection while you are cleaning. PPE protects you from any contaminated material that is still in the space when you get started. It may also protect you from toxic or irritating chemicals in the products you are using to clean and disinfect.

- Wear clean, long-sleeved clothing to protect skin.
- Wear disposable gloves when throughout the cleaning process. Gloves should be thrown away after each cleaning. Never wash or reuse gloves. Clean your hands immediately after removing gloves by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. Soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled.

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- If part of the clean-up might cause splashing of fluids, you will need additional PPE, including a disposable face mask and goggles to protect your eyes, nose and mouth and a disposable gown.
- Properly dispose of all gloves and face masks according to the guidelines at the end of this document.

### Wait a day if that's feasible

Care should be taken when handling items that were used or touched by the deceased since the virus can survive for a time on different surfaces.

- If practical, as noted above, wait to clean the space until **at least one day (24 hours)** after removal of the body.
- Air out the space by opening windows before cleaning if you can. Proper ventilation of the space will allow for respiratory droplets to be removed from the air prior to cleaning and disinfecting.

### Best practices for cleaning specific living spaces:

- **Hard surfaces or "high touch" surfaces** such as countertops, tabletops, doorknobs, toilets, etc. should be cleaned first with soap and water. Then apply the disinfectant as instructed on the label. Ensure the disinfectant sits and coats the surface for the contact time listed on the label.
- **Soft surfaces** such as carpeted floors, rugs, drapes, etc. should be cleaned with water and soap or with cleaners appropriate for use of these surfaces.
- **Laundry items** such as bedding, towels, clothing, etc. should be washed according to manufacturer's instructions using the warmest water setting possible. Items should be completely dry before next use.
  - Wear gloves when handling dirty laundry. Clean your hands after removal of gloves.
  - Do not shake dirty laundry. Shaking can spread virus through the air.
  - Clean and disinfect clothes hampers that held dirty laundry according to guidance below.
- **Electronics**, such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards and remote controls should be wiped down following the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting.
  - If no guidance is available, use alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol. Let surfaces dry thoroughly.
- **Trash** should be collected in a trash can lined with a plastic trash bag. When full, tie the bag shut and dispose outside in the household trash can.
- **Removing Personal Protective Equipment** in the correct order is important to avoid infection.
  - First remove and dispose of gloves; clean your hands after removal of gloves by washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
  - Next remove the goggles with one hand and the facemask with the other hand and dispose of the face mask. Clean your hands again.
  - Place all used gloves, face masks, and other contaminated items in plastic trash bag and tie shut before disposing with another household waste. Clean hands after handling these items.

***Once thorough cleaning and disinfection has been completed, the space can be reoccupied.***

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For more general information about COVID-19, visit:

- [Los Angeles County Department of Public Health](#)
- [California Department of Public Health](#)

For specific information about clean up, including detailed information about removing and discarding PPE, visit:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Cleaning Guidance](#)
- [Environmental Protection Agency, Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#)

