



### Field Operations & Investigations Response to Deaths

COVID-19 continues to spread countywide. As a result, the response to certain calls for service must be modified to better protect our personnel in the field. This briefing memo is intended to improve our response to death investigations to better protect ourselves, Orange County Fire Authority, and the public at large.

#### **COVID-19 Response to Death Investigations**

- Effective immediately, responding personnel to all death investigations or medical aids **SHALL** wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including gloves, eye protection, and N-95 mask or equivalent.
- If COVID-19 is confirmed or suspected on scene, responding personnel on scene **SHALL** wear a protective gown.
- While interviewing the informant and/or witnesses at the scene, responding personnel **SHALL** determine if the victim, witnesses, or informants have had or could have had exposure to COVID-19. If exposure to COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed, responding personnel shall notify their immediate supervisor and document the exposure in their casualty report.
- Currently COVID-19 virus related deaths, with no underlying reportable causes, are classified as natural deaths. In most cases, the Coroner's office does not respond to natural deaths unless they fall under the following circumstances:
  - Unattended death in a residence (under 8 to 12 hours)
  - Deaths that appear natural, but are unexpected
  - Suspicious circumstances
  - Allegations of abuse/neglect
  - Next of kin or family not present at the scene

Regardless if the coroner will respond or not, deputies shall always contact the coroner regarding any death investigation.

- Prior to responding to a skilled nursing facility, the deputy shall call the facility to ask the following questions to determine if a patrol response is required:





- Are you calling from a licensed care facility for the elderly?
  - Is the deceased currently under the care of a licensed physician or on hospice care?
  - If under the care of a physician, is the physician willing to sign the death certificate?
  - Do you believe the cause of death to be natural?
  - Was the deceased experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19?
  - Did the deceased have a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order?
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- If responding to a skilled nursing facility, board and care or assisted living facility, responding personnel shall take universal precautions to secure the scene and surrounding area to decrease the possible exposure of any pathogens on scene. All patients and residents located in these facilities should be considered at a high risk to be infected or susceptible to be infected by COVID-19. If exposure to COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed, deputies shall notify their immediate supervisor and document the exposure in their casualty report. Personnel should follow procedures as described in Training Bulletin 20-04 dated March 13, 2020.
  - Once a scene has been rendered safe, responding personnel should consider a 1-inside/1-outside or similar approach. According to OCFA, this has been shown to be a very effective method for minimizing the risk of exposure.
  - All personnel shall, at the completion of each medical aid or death investigation, sanitize all their personal equipment, duty belts, footwear, and interior of their patrol vehicles. All PPE shall be disposed of or sanitized if appropriate.

This memo is not intended to be a comprehensive guide on the response to death investigations. It is only intended to provide additional protective measures reference COVID-19. For a comprehensive breakdown of the correct response to death investigations please refer to the Field Operations Manual Section 14: Deaths.

