

BURIAL PREPARATION OF A DECEASED BODY

INFECTED WITH A CONTAGIOUS
DISEASE (E.G., COVID-19)

According to the Edicts of His Eminence
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Preparation of a deceased body that is infected with a contagious disease (e.g., COVID-19) according to the edicts of His Eminence Ayatullah Sayyid al-Sistani (May God prolong his life)

Carrying out required washing, shrouding, and burying of a person whose cause of death is an infectious virus (e.g., coronavirus) or other contagious pathogen (e.g., bacteria), or who may otherwise be infected with a contagious disease, requires caution and avoidance [as much as is necessary to ensure safety and prevention of spread].

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

It is incumbent on anyone who is involved in the preparation of a deceased body that has an infectious virus or other pathogen to adhere to the guidelines provided by healthcare professionals. This includes the following:

- ☑ Long-sleeve, fluid-repellent disposable gown
- ☑ Gloves with long tight-fitting cuffs
- ☑ Face mask or shield as required.
- ☑ Eye protection, such as single use full-face visors or goggles.
- ☑ When moving from a dirty to a clean task remove the gloves, disinfect hands and put on a pair of clean gloves ensuring that the cuffs of the gloves cover the cuffs of the gown.
- ☑ Soil used for dry ablution (tayammum) must be disposed of with the PPE and must not be reused.

Necessary procedures at the time of death

- ☑ Wear all necessary protective equipment and instruct the family of the deceased to do so as well before making contact with the deceased
- ☑ If the person died at home or anywhere other than in a medical facility, including a nursing home or palliative care center, contact the local, state or provincial department of public health or the office of the city chief medical examiner. Contact information can be readily found on city, state or provincial website pages.
- ☑ Maintain minimum contact with the family of the deceased and remind them to observe patience and caution them of the dangers of making contact with the body.



Things to avoid during the preparation of the deceased

- ☑ Eating, drinking, or smoking.
- ☑ Touching one's face or any other part of the body that is not covered.

Performing a ritual wash on the deceased

- ☑ Maintain personal protective equipment at all times.
- ☑ Use a well-ventilated area.
- ☑ Wounds (if any) must be covered with appropriate containment material that prevents the spread of any contagious substances.
- ☑ If there is no risk of spreading the disease, remove the plastic bag from over the deceased and dispose of it in an appropriate biohazard container. NOTE: any waste that has come into contact with the deceased body or its tissue (e.g., blood) cannot be disposed of in an ordinary garbage.
- ☑ Wash the body three times as required under Islamic rules provided that it does not pose harm to the person who undertakes the preparation of the deceased.

Performing (dry ablution) tayammum on the deceased in place of a ritual wash (ghusl)

- ☑ If it is not possible to perform ghusl without risk, then tayammum must be performed.
- ☑ Tayammum on a dead body must be performed by the hands of the one performing tayammum (i.e., the one performing the rituals of death and burial). There is no problem in wearing gloves if not doing so poses a risk.
- ☑ If neither a ritual wash nor dry ablution are possible due to the potential of severe harm to the person(s) performing the rituals of death, the obligation is then revoked.

Camphorating the deceased

- ☑ Camphor must be applied to the seven parts of the body of the deceased as required by Islamic rules if it does not pose a risk to the person(s) performing the act.

Shrouding the deceased

- ☑ It is necessary to shroud the deceased with three garments, even if it is done over an insulating plastic cover.
- ☑ Place the shrouded body in a transparent bag and place it in a coffin for transport.
- ☑ Wipe the outside of the coffin with diluted bleach.

Funeral prayer

- ☑ Anyone who partakes in the funeral prayer must wear the appropriate personal protective equipment.

- ☑ It is advised to perform the funeral prayer at the cemetery due to the availability of more space, which allows the participants to keep the necessary distance from each other.
- ☑ Keep a distance of two meters away from the coffin.
- ☑ Funeral prayer does not require ablution (wudhu). Moreover, it is not obligatory on everyone, rather it is sufficient if one person performs it. If it is performed in congregation participants do not have to stand close to each other. NOTE: participants in the congregation should heed the guidelines of the health professionals and err on the side of precaution (i.e., whether to attend or not) if engaging in the prayer poses a risk
- ☑ Remove and dispose of the PPE and wash hands with liquid soap and warm water immediately for over 40 seconds.

Burial

- ☑ Keep the number of people handling the coffin to a minimum.
- ☑ All handlers of the coffin must wear appropriate personal protective equipment.
- ☑ Conduct the burial as normal (i.e., following the Islamic rules)
- ☑ It is recommended to bury in a body bag/coffin.
- ☑ Do not remove the body from the bag or coffin, or open the shroud during the burial.
- ☑ DO NOT remove/open the coffin lid at any point.
- ☑ Bury the coffin under the ground.
- ☑ If possible, the deceased must be placed on their right side, albeit in the coffin, facing the direction of Qibla in the grave.

It is recommended to inculcate the deceased (Talqin)¹ and it is not necessary to open the shroud or bag when doing so. Rather it is acceptable to inculcate the deceased while placed in the grave before closing it, and even after closing the grave.

Question: *Cadavers infected with contagious pathogens (e.g., coronavirus) are often cremated in some non-Muslim countries. Is it permissible to cremate a Muslim's body? Should the family of the deceased refrain from it if they have a choice?*

Answer: *It is not permissible to cremate the dead body of a Muslim, and the family and relatives, or anyone else must refrain from it and insist on burying the deceased according to Islamic laws.*

¹Talqin is to reindoctrinate to the deceased the testimonies of faith, which is to bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger, as well to reaffirm faith in the twelve Imams and the fundamental pillars of faith.

Information resources

CDC Emergency Preparedness and Response:

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/index.asp>

CDC COVID-19 (coronavirus) information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

CDC State and territory department of health websites:

<https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/healthdirectories/healthdepartments.html>

Health Canada COVID-19 (coronavirus) information:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

Latest religious questions and answers regarding preparation of a deceased body that is infected with contagious diseases:

<https://imam-us.org/islamic-rulings-regarding-coronavirus-according-grand-ayatullah-al-sayyid-ali-al-husseini-al-sistani/>