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Government of India
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Directorate General of Health Services
(EMR Division)

Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi
Dated 26th April, 2020

To,

Additional Secretary (Foreigners)
Ministry of Home Affairs
North Block
New Delhi - 110001

Sub: Guidelines for Importation of Human Remains of COVID -19 patients

Sir,

Please refer to OM No. 25022/06/2020-Imm; dated 25.04.2020, regarding management of dead bodies and mortal remains of Indian Nationals/OCI card holders transported from abroad.

The matter has been examined in the Ministry and a guideline on importation of Human Remains of COVID -19 patients is enclosed.

This issues with the approval of Secretary (H).

Yours sincerely



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Guidelines for Importation of Human Remains related with COVID-19
(to be followed in accordance of directives issued by MHA)

The **Human Remains** here means the dead body and the exhumed body of confirmed/suspected COVID – 19 patients.

Standard Operating Procedures

1. Importation of Human Remains of Confirmed/Suspected COVID -19 cases:

The importation of the Human Remains of confirmed/suspected COVID -19 case into India is not recommended.

2. Human remains suspected or confirmed of COVID -19, if landing at Indian Airports:

Contrary to the above mentioned recommendation, in case if human remains of the suspected /confirmed case of COVID -19 arrives at Indian Airports the following procedures shall be carried out by the concerned Airport Health Officer (APHO) –

2.1 Documents to be inspected /examined: Airlines to submit the following documents at least 48 hrs. prior to importation of any human remains for verification by APHO

- a) Death certificate mentioning the cause of death as confirmed COVID -19/suspected COVID -19.
- b) No objection certificate (NOC) for the transportation of Human Remains of the deceased issued by the Indian Embassies / High Commissions / Consulates.
- c) Embalming certificate issued by an authorized agency.
- d) Cancelled copy of passport
- e) Certificate of packaging of Human Remains as per WHO guidelines

2.2 Examination of Packaging of Human Remains as per Indian Aircraft rules 1954 -

- a. Human Remains should be packed as per WHO guidelines and a certificate to this effect may be given to APHO during clearance of the human remains.
- b. The concerned airline shall ensure that the external packing of human remains (Coffin) is undamaged. APHO to verify the documents as mentioned in Point 2.1 above, and inspect the packing in accordance with the provisions under the Indian Aircraft (Public Health) Rules, 1954.
- c. If there are any obvious signs of damage to the external packing (coffin), the handlers shall use PPE (water resistant apron, goggles, N 95 masks, gloves) cover the coffin in plastic sheets to avoid any contact with the body/ body fluids before hand-over of the human remains to the concerned authority for final burial/incineration /cremation.
- d. The personnel handling the human remains should follow the laid down procedures for donning and doffing of Personal Protective Equipment (water resistant apron, goggles, N 95 masks, gloves) and follow other protective measures for COVID-19 like, hand-washing with soap and water, etc. to ensure that they remain protected during the procedure.

- e. The packaging (coffin) shall be buried / incinerated following the norms for burial / incineration for human remains. The handlers shall be monitored for 14 days and the designated vehicle shall be disinfected as per the norms.
- f. In all such cases (as mentioned in 'b' above), the APHO shall direct the concerned airline (carrying the damaged packing containing human remains) to carry out the disinfection of the aircraft as per the norms. In addition, the staff handling the cargo (Human remains in question) shall be monitored for 14 days.

3. The transportation of the ASHES of the cremated person died of Confirmed/Suspected COVID -19 case-

The ashes remaining after cremation pose no risk to the relatives who handle such mortal remains and will be cleared in accordance with the provisions under the Indian Aircraft (Public Health) Rules, 1954.

4. In case of any onboard death during COVID-19 Pandemic – (To be followed in accordance with directives issued from MHA from time to time)

- a. Any death onboard during the COVID-19 pandemic, is to be suspected of infective etiology, unless proved otherwise.
- b. The pilot in command of the Aircraft has to inform about the death onboard to APHO through Air Traffic Controller (ATC) for taking appropriate measures.
- c. The crew will cover the dead body with sheets / blankets and move the passengers from nearby seats to other seats.
- d. If the remaining flight time is more than 8 hours, the pilot would seek permission to land at the nearest airport.
- e. When the aircraft lands within the Indian territory, the following procedures would be opted:
 - i. The pilot in command of the Aircraft has to mention in the General Declaration, the details of any illness / symptoms reported / experienced by the deceased prior to death and submit it to the APHO along with list of passengers and crew who came in close contact with the body.
 - ii. Plug Oral, nasal orifices of the dead body to prevent leakage of body fluids.
 - iii. All passengers shall disembark before the dead body is handled inside the Aircraft.
 - iv. Trained staff from the Airport, using PPE, shall move the deceased from the aircraft seat to a wheelchair. The wheelchair shall be taken out onto the tarmac.
 - v. At the tarmac, a nasal swab shall be taken by the State Health Authorities and sealed in triple layered package (refer to guidance on sample collection and packaging) for testing at a designated lab.
 - vi. Thereafter, the body shall be placed in a leak proof plastic body bag and hermetically sealed.
 - vii. The personnel handling the dead body shall follow the laid down procedure for donning and doffing of Personal Protective Equipment (water resistant apron, goggles, N 95 masks, gloves) and follow other protective measures for COVID-19 like, hand-washing with soap and water, etc. to ensure that they remain protected during the procedure.
 - viii. The law enforcement agencies to be informed as per the provisions of the rules.
 - ix. The relatives of the deceased, if not co-passenger(s), will be informed immediately.
 - x. If applicable, APHO will issue a brought/received-dead certificate.

- xi. If a delay in arrival of relatives of the deceased is expected/ till the report of COVID- 19 is received, the dead body shall be kept in mortuary of the designated hospital, with full sanitization process. Further, the body would be transported in a designated vehicle to the burial ground / crematorium as per the directives during lockdown.
 - xii. The APHO should properly counsel the family members/ DSO (District Surveillance Officer) & Local Police officer, for careful handling and not to damage/temper/change the packaging of the human remains.
 - xiii. Autopsy in confirmed COVID -19 cases is not recommended. If report is COVID-19 negative, natural process as per law to be adopted.
- f. The disinfection & decontamination of the Aircraft is to be done as per the approved procedures. Also, the vehicle used for carrying the dead body needs to be disinfected. The tarmac area where the body is kept while drawing sample and during sealing, is also to be disinfected.
 - g. Airlines will provide the detailed list of passengers and crew to the APHO for further surveillance by the IDSP for next 14 days.
5. **Role of DSO** (District Surveillance Officer) - The counseling of the family members, collecting list of all possible contacts & keeping them under surveillance for a period of 14 days.

The disposal of PPEs and Surface disinfection should be as per Standard guidelines available at MOHFW website.