COVID-19 Best Practice for Response to the Deceased

Adopted 4/2/2020
Revised 4/9/2020

- When a death occurs outside of the hospital or hospice care the King County Medical Examiner's Office (KCMEO) has to be notified. This is a law enforcement function. The death must be reported by a law enforcement (LE) officer to the KCMEO and it must have an LE case number assigned to it.

- Once the fire crew on scene has completed their life saving efforts the scene is then turned over to LE. A chaplain can be called as a resource for the family. The role of the chaplain is to facilitate the process with the family acting as a liaison between the fire crew, the officer, the family, and the funeral home or KCMEO. In the absence of a chaplain this role is the function of the LE officer on scene. Once the fire crew has completed their tasks and turned the scene over to LE they can clear and go back in service. There is no expectation that the fire crew will remain on scene to facilitate the reporting process to the KCMEO.

- In some instances, following pronouncement of death the paramedics may acquire a nasopharyngeal swab to test for COVID if status is unknown. The paramedic will secure the swab for DOH lab testing as part of an approved Medical Examiner process. (See Paramedic Collection of Postmortem COVID swab by EMS document.)

- If the death is potentially related to COVID the **KCMEO will not be sending out an investigator** and the deceased will be released to the funeral home of the families choosing. Funeral homes are responding and are wearing full PPE for these types of cases. The KCMEO will issue a NJA (No Jurisdiction Assumed) number. If for some reason the KCMEO investigator responds to the scene they will be following their protocol for response.

- For deaths that occur when the patient is in hospice care there should be no response from fire or police unless the family activates the system by calling 911. Hospice cases do not need to go through the KCMEO unless there is a concern for non-natural circumstances. If fire crews respond to a hospice death, COVID related or not, the scene still needs to be turned over to LE. LE will contact the KCMEO. If the family follows the hospice protocol, the 911 system is not activated, and Fire and LE have no involvement.