

Q&A

Managing Resident Deaths in Long-Term Care (LTC) Sector

What is the Managing Resident Deaths Team (MRDT)?

The MRDT is a dedicated resource individual (or team) in each long-term care (LTC) facility assigned to provide efficient, proactive, and respectful disposition of the deceased during the COVID-19 outbreak.

What is the role of the Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) in the process?

During the COVID-19 outbreak, a special team will be available at Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC Team) to assist with efficient, proactive and respectful disposition of deceased persons. The **OCC Team** will assist with the completion and delivery of the Medical Certificates of Death for natural hospital deaths and deaths in long-term care (LTC) homes.

Is this change going to be more work for the LTC home staff?

Changes being introduced should result in a more efficient process for managing resident deaths in long-term care homes.

- Transferring deceased residents directly into the care of the funeral service sector is an efficient process and replicates existing practices
- It reduces pressure on the health care and LTC systems to manage the storage of deceased persons
- It minimizes entry of individuals (funeral service providers) into the LTC facility.
- It decreases exposure and risk of transmission to funeral service providers in scenarios with potentially limited personal protective equipment (PPE)
- It allows front-line staff to rapidly resume direct patient care.

Who should be on the Managing Resident Deaths Team (MRDT)?

- The size of the LTC home and staffing complement will inform the team membership
- The Director of Care will likely be the Managing Resident Deaths primary contact and the post death care process will likely match many existing practices
- Important considerations include:
 - Ability to manage the sensitive nature of conversations with grieving families (i.e., choosing a funeral home)
 - Professionals who have likely interacted with the families previously
 - Ability to facilitate completion and submission of documents to OCC Team

Does the MRDT only work with COVID deaths?

- No. During the COVID-19 outbreak period, the MRDT will manage **all deaths** occurring in LTC homes.
- This process applies to both LTC homes where a COVID-19 outbreak has been declared as well as LTC homes not under outbreak protocols.

Who can pronounce death?

- There is no legal requirement that would prevent an RN or RPN from *pronouncing* death, as clarified by the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO). However, only a physician or a Registered Nurse (Extended Class) can *certify* death.
- The Office of the Chief Coroner will certify all deaths in LTC using the information provided to on the MRDR team during this outbreak.

What is the role of the LTC on-call physician or Nurse Practitioner?

- The LTC physician or NP does not need to attend the LTC home to pronounce death.
- The physician or NP will be required to provide guidance to the MRDR team in the LTC home as to the immediate and antecedent cause(s) of death, and other significant contributing conditions, which will be entered by the MRDR team on the template for submission to the OCC.
- The OCC team will complete the electronic MCODE
- The OCC team may follow up with the physician and MRDR team if further clarification is needed.
- As this process will continue 24/7, it is important that the on-call physician is available to assist the MRD team with informing these key pieces of information whenever a death occurs.

What about a death that requires a coroner investigation?

- The Institutional Patient Death Record (IPDR) will continue to be required and provided to the OCC as part of the Managing Resident Deaths process.
- The OCC Team will review the IPDR and proceed with contacting a coroner when required.
- Deaths that are secondary to COVID-19 should not be characterized as unexpected deaths in the IPDR

If a death requires a coroner investigation, do we leave the deceased resident in their room in the LTC facility?

- No. Regardless of whether a death requires a coroner investigation, the movement of the resident to the funeral home by the funeral service provider will proceed.
- When required, the OCC Team will contact a coroner who will connect with the funeral home.

If the death is characterized as a sudden or unexpected death and notification to Compliance is required what coroner name do you provide?

- Please indicate that the death was reported to the OCC team as part of the Managing Resident Deaths in Long Term Care process.
- When required, the OCC Team will contact a coroner who will connect with the funeral home if necessary.

Are there changes to the IPDR process?

- The IPDR is incorporated as part of the Managing Resident Death Report (MRDR) as a single template for the duration of this process during the and needs to be completed and sent to the OCC Team.
- Computer/online completion of the IPDR is not required as manual completion of the IPDR is part of the MDR process during the COVID-19 outbreak period.

Question 9 of the Institutional Patient Death Record (IPDR) references Ministry of Health (MOH) Compliance or Critical Incident Findings.

a) What is the relevant time period?

b) How can these be accessed as they are often maintained separate from the resident's health record?

- Please provide evaluate to determine if there have been MOH Compliance or critical incident findings within the year prior to the death of the resident
- Each LTC home Director of Care should identify a method to ensure timely access to this information to support timely completion of the MRDR

How quickly should the MRDT complete the Managing Resident Deaths Report (MRDR) and IDPR send it to the OCC?

- This process should be completed within a few hours of the death.
- The MRDR can be sent to the OCC by one of the following methods:
 - **Email:** save and send the completed report as an email attachment to occteam@ontario.ca
 - Secure Web Form: submit the completed report as an attachment in the [OCC-OFPS Secure Web Form](#) (see attached instructions)
 - **FAX: 1 (888) 247-1845**

How does the MRDT obtain assistance with completion of the cause of death (COD) information for the OCC Team?

- Engage promptly with the attending clinician for information and guidance on completion of the MRDR COD section.
- Obtain both the immediate cause of death and the underlying cause of death (if applicable) in the MRDR.
- The OCC Team will complete the Medical Certificate of Death.

Where do I send the MRDR?

- The MRDR can be sent to the OCC by one of the following methods:
 - **Email:** save and send the completed report as an email attachment to occteam@ontario.ca
 - Secure Web Form: submit the completed report as an attachment in the [OCC-OFPS Secure Web Form](#) (see attached instructions)
 - **FAX: 1 (888) 247-1845**

Who calls the funeral home?

- The family must call the funeral home to request their services and initiate transfer of the deceased resident.
- Ensure the family member who has the necessary legal authority contacts the funeral home immediately after providing the information to the MRDT.
- The MRDT should also call the funeral home to let them know that the family will be in contact, to expect their call, and to facilitate prompt transfer of the deceased resident.

What information will the MRDT share with the funeral service provider?

- The MRDT will provide the funeral service provider with details about the deceased resident including the family name and contact information, the LTC home name and site, location of release and contact process at the time of arrival.
- The MRDT will notify the funeral service if the death resulted from COVID-19 (or if COVID-19 was suspected).
- Notify the funeral service provider if the resident has a pacemaker

Are funeral homes aware of these changes to the current practice?

- Funeral service providers have been working together with the Office of the Chief Coroner to prepare this approach
- They have been informed of and their role to promptly attend to transfer a deceased resident into their care
- They are aware that the medical certificate of death will not be transported with the body but sent electronically from the OCC directly to the funeral home.
- From a health and safety perspective they routinely clean their stretcher between transfers.

Who ensures proper identification (ID) is on the deceased resident?

- The nurse or physician who was providing care should ensure there is an ID bracelet or other appropriate form of ID on the resident.
 - ID arm bands may be available as part of the home evacuation plan
- In addition, ID must be affixed securely to the outside of the body bag.
- In cases of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 deaths, you must label the body bag with “COVID-19”.
- Before the deceased resident is moved, the MRDT must ensure that the ID on the resident matches the ID on the body bag. **This is of critical importance.**

Who provides the body bag?

- Use LTC supply for body bags. If no body bags are available, let the funeral service provider know in advance of their arrival.
- If the LTC does not have a body bag, the funeral service provider will provide the staff member with a body bag upon arrival at the release area.

- It is important to remember that the outside of the body bag must be disinfected after the deceased resident is placed inside.

Who transfers the deceased resident to the body bag?

- LTC staff will be required to transfer the deceased resident into the body bag as the funeral service providers will not be entering into the LTC home, to prevent any inadvertent transmission of COVID-19

Should tubes, catheters and lines be removed from the body before placement into the body bag?

- Any actions that may result in movement or splashing of fluids from the body should be avoided to reduce the risk of transmission of infection
- Tubes, catheters and lines should be left in place on the deceased resident unless these impede with placement in and closure of the body bag.
- Funeral service providers will proceed with removal during any necessary preparation of the body.
- PPE appropriate for care of isolated COVID -19 patients should be utilized during all preparation of the deceased resident prior to transfer from the resident's room

What should be done with jewellery that the deceased resident is wearing?

- If the family wish for the jewellery to remain on the deceased resident at the time of burial or cremation it should be left in place.
- If the family would like to take jewellery or other personal effects separately these should be removed prior to transfer from the resident's room and disinfected with hospital-grade disinfectant or wash in a diluted bleach solution prior to providing these to the family.

Should the clothing be removed from a deceased resident during the preparations for transfer?

- Any actions that may result in movement or splashing of fluids from the body should be avoided to reduce the risk of transmission of infection
- Clothing should be left on the resident when placed in the body bag as removal may increase risk of exposure to bodily fluids
- If the family would like the clothing returned, they should communicate that to the funeral services provider.

Can we place a blanket over the body bag as the stretcher is transferred to the release area?

- While recognizing the desirability of this practice any object placed over the body bag on the stretcher increases the risk of contamination and should not occur
- If the family wishes that personal belongings accompany the deceased resident to the funeral home, e.g., a personal item like blanket placed over the deceased resident this can occur inside the body bag.
- The blanket will be potentially contaminated must remain in the body bag with the deceased resident.

Is a shroud the same as a body bag?

- No, a shroud is different from a body bag.
- Common post death care of the deceased involves the use of a plastic shroud or sheet placed around the body
- A shroud does not fully enclose the body as a body bag will and therefore a shroud does not protect from risk of contamination.
- The body bag contains the infection coupled with disinfecting the external surface reduces the risk of transmission of infection.

Should the LTC home staff wash the body during the preparation for transfer?

- Any actions that may result in movement or splashing of fluids from the body should be avoided to reduce the risk of transmission of infection
- It recommended that staff do not wash the body to avoid any additional risk of transmission of the virus

Can a mechanical lift be utilized to assist with transfer to the funeral home stretcher?

- A mechanical lift can be used to assist with the transfer the body from the bed to the funeral home stretcher
- The body bags do not have any items that will assist with lift use so straps must be used
- The straps should be disinfected after use following routine isolation disinfecting practices

Who labels the body bag?

- The MRDT must ensure that the body bag is properly labelled, preferably with an indelible ink marker, i.e. Sharpie, and ensuring that it matches the ID on the deceased resident. **This is of critical importance.**
- Clear, legible labeling on the body bag is extremely important.
- The most effective way to do so is label the bag prior to disinfecting the bag in the room
- The following information must be clearly labeled on the bag:
 - Full name of the resident
 - Date of birth
 - In cases of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 deaths, the bag must be labelled “COVID-19”
- While a peel and stick label can be used, ensure that it will not come off during the disinfecting process
- It is important to remember that the body bag must be disinfected after the deceased resident is placed inside.

Who washes the body bag?

- An MRDT member(s) washes the body bag.
- The body bag must be disinfected after the resident is placed inside and before transfer from the resident’s room to minimize risk of transmission during transfer to the release area.
- The body bag should also be disinfected at the time of release to the funeral service provider.

What does the bag get wiped down with?

- Wipe the outside of the bag with one of the following:
 - a disinfectant solution, either a hospital-grade disinfectant according to manufacturer's recommendations
 - wipes with anti-viral action, e.g. Clorox wipes
 - a diluted concentration of bleach (a minimum concentration of 0.1% (1000 ppm)) ([WHO, 2020](#))
- Start disinfecting from the perimeter, then the zipper ending with the centre to ensure complete coverage.

Do the funeral service providers come into the LTC facility to transfer the deceased resident?

- No. The funeral service providers will remain outside of the facility at the designated release area.
- The funeral home will provide the MRDT with a stretcher at the door.
- The MRDT will move the deceased resident and wash the body bag on the funeral home stretcher.
- The stretcher will be transferred to the funeral service provider outside the door of the designated release area.

What if there is no family?

- At times, deceased residents may not have any available or involved family:
 - The person may have indicated this during life to LTC staff
 - The Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee may be acting as their decision maker in the absence of next of kin
- If there is no family known to be involved, please complete the No NOK section on the MRDR
- At the time of sending the MRDR, please contact the OCC Team who will assist with prompt disposition planning.
- Contact numbers
 - **Toll Free: 1 (833) 915-0868**
 - **Local (Toronto): 1 (647) 792-0440**

What if the family can't decide on a funeral home?

- Advise that the selection of a funeral home must be done promptly, given exceptional circumstances.
- The MRDT can use the Funeral Home Finder-Dynamic Tool to provide the list of nearby funeral homes to the family to assist with their decision.
- Advise that if unable to choose, the MRDT will proceed with choosing a funeral home that family members will be required to work with.

What if the family doesn't call the funeral home?

- Advise that the MRDT will also be calling the funeral home to proceed with transfer of the deceased resident into the care of the funeral home.
- Encourage prompt connection with funeral home to minimize distress.

What if the family wishes to exercise religious or cultural practices for the deceased resident in the LTC facility?

- It is recognized that families may have specific religious beliefs or practices they wish to follow at the end of life.
- If the family belongs to a particular place of worship, encourage the family to contact them as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements.
- The family may also discuss any personal, faith based or cultural practices with their funeral services provider.
- Advise that family will be unable to wash or touch the deceased resident while in the LTC home.
- Given the strict restrictions on visitor entry into LTC homes outside clergy should not attend the home

Can we practice ceremony such as honour guards?

- During the MRD process in the COVID-19 outbreak period ceremonies such as honour guards should not occur.
- While this is unfortunate and challenging it is important to ensure all steps are taken to reduce any potential risk of transmission to other residents staff.
- We acknowledge that all deceased residents were a cherished member of their families and communities and encourage other virtual methods of honouring the loss of a dearly loved community and family member.

Can the family accompany the deceased resident to the LTC release area?

- This is advised against: Family members will not be permitted to accompany the deceased resident through the LTC facility release area, due to the increased risk of transmission for family members, care providers and funeral service providers.
- The family may be able to see the deceased resident at the funeral home.

How do I get the Medical Certificate of Death (MCD)?

- The Medical Certificate of Death will be securely sent electronically to the funeral service provider by the OCC; it will not be sent to the institution where the death occurred.
- For LTC homes, a copy of the IPDR and MRDR should be added to the resident's health record.

For LTC homes within hospital settings, what process should be followed?

LTC homes that are within hospital settings should follow the Managing Resident Deaths in Long-Term Care process.

Does this MDR process apply to retirement homes?

- No. This process applies to LTC homes only
- The Office of the Chief Coroner is working with the retirement home operators and regulator to develop an approach to support this sector.

Do we need to follow all the steps outlined in the process if the home is not on outbreak and has no COVID-19 infections?

- One of the key principles of the Managing Resident Deaths in Long-Term Care is to take all necessary steps to prevent transmission of COVID-19 into the home and to residents and staff.
- The placement of deceased residents into body bags, labelling, disinfecting the external surface, maintaining FH staff outside the home and transfer using the FH stretcher will be followed for all deaths whether the home is in outbreak or not.
- Completing the MRDR process in a timely manner must occur to ensure that funeral service providers do not become overloaded, e.g. waiting to contact FH in the morning may overwhelm their capacity to attend.
- Other after care decisions must be carefully considered in the context of potential transmission of the virus, i.e. need for complete assurance of no infections in residents and no risk with entry of visitors into the home.