



COVID-19 Updates - March 20, 2020

Dear MFDA Member:

Below is your update for Friday, March 20th. There is a lot of important information here. Remember all information contained in our updates will also be posted on the COVID-19 page of our website within 24 hours of this email. Our COVID-19 web page can be found at www.massfda.org/COVID-19.

Mortuary Workers Named as Critical Infrastructure Workers

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) named mortuary workers as "critical infrastructure workers." This underscores the vital role funeral directors and others who work in death care play in responding to the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The MFDA was part of the communication sent yesterday to United States Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar requesting this classification. Thank you to the National Funeral Directors Association for their leadership in this effort on behalf of all the state associations. The specific exemption reads as follows:

- Workers performing mortuary services, including funeral homes, crematoriums, and cemetery workers
- Workers who coordinate with other organizations to ensure the proper recovery, handling, identification, transportation, tracking, storage, and disposal of human remains and personal effects; certify cause of death; and facilitate access to mental/behavioral health services to the family members, responders, and survivors of an incident

The entire document can be accessed [here](#) for your review if desired.

MFDA Advocacy for Funeral Directors

The Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association has led the advocacy about the above issue in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We are very optimistic that the state will mirror federal guidelines. In the interim, the following is our correspondence with state officials informing them about yesterday's federal action specific to funeral service and the request for primary access to PPE. [Click here](#) if you would like a copy to share with your local officials.

Sent To:

Charles Baker, Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Marylou Sudders, Secretary Health and Human Services
Thomas A. Turco, Secretary Executive Office of Public Safety and Security
Monica Bharel, MD, MPH, Commissioner Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Mindy Hull, MD, Chief Medical Examiner of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

RE: Inclusion of Death Care Professionals in All COVID-19 Orders and Access to Personal Protective Equipment

We are writing to address the following two issues:

- Classification of Funeral Directors and Other Death Care Workers as Critical Infrastructure Workers
- Priority Access to Personal Protective Equipment for Funeral Service Professionals

In the event the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should issue an order to shelter in place, the Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association is requesting that all orders include an exemption for death care professionals. The Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association believes all death care professionals

including funeral homes, crematories, cemeteries and suppliers to these businesses are related and essential infrastructure. We encourage any new orders from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to specifically identify the death care professions as an essential business and function to avoid any confusion. Importantly, federal guidance has already listed death care workers as "critical infrastructure workers." On March 19, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) named mortuary workers as "critical infrastructure workers." This underscores the vital role funeral directors and others who work in death care play in responding to the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

This guidance defines mortuary workers as "Workers performing mortuary services, including funeral homes, crematoriums, and cemetery workers" and "Workers who coordinate with other organizations to ensure the proper recovery, handling, identification, transportation, tracking, storage, and disposal of human remains and personal effects; certify cause of death; and facilitate access to mental/behavioral health services to the family members, responders, and survivors of an incident," are included in the "Healthcare/Public Health" category along with doctors, nurses, people performing testing and researchers. This essentially covers the full spectrum of those who work in death care.

The Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association suggests this guidance language be used in any orders. This guidance helps define for state and local public health officials the professions that are essential to the COVID-19 pandemic response. The guidance specifically notes that critical infrastructure workers should have priority access to personal protective equipment and be exempt from "shelter-in-place" mandates. Regardless of whether a shelter in place is ordered, we also want to request that funeral service professionals are given priority access to Personal Protective Equipment as many, like other health care providers and first responders, may soon experience shortages.

Thank you for your leadership, guidance and support during this challenging time in our Commonwealth and nation.

Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association

CR Lyons, President

Margaret M. Nolan, Executive Director

PPE Update:

Thank you to those of you who responded to our request for information on PPE equipment. It provided us with a very valuable snapshot of what the needs could be for the funeral service community. This statewide information (not individual funeral home reports) has been shared with state officials and we have been advised by Dr. Mindy Hull, Chief Medical Examiner of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that our request is being considered and tracked by the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) which falls under the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security.

In addition, here are two important pieces of advice:

1. Obviously, yesterday's federal designation as "critical infrastructure workers" goes a long way to helping funeral service receive the important PPE supplies they need. According to NFDA, the Federal government is allocating PPEs from the Strategic National Stockpile directly to each state and then "hotspots" are receiving additional PPE's. However, state and local governments must request supplies through the federal system and we know that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has made that request through the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response.

Therefore, funeral service firms facing a serious shortage should reach out to their local Board of Health to ask that you are included on a list of providers from the community that may need supplies in the future/near future (or currently if facing a severe shortage.)

2. Also we've received several good recommendations from members that have offered the suggestion that you should think about relationships in your community or friends that may own or be affiliated with businesses that are currently not operating such as some dental practices,

construction firms and trade workers. Many of these community colleagues are willing to share a portion of their supplies to help at this critical time.

Outreach to the Hospice and Palliative Care Federation of Massachusetts.

Yesterday we provided you with our recommendations to facilitate the transfer of deceased patients from nursing homes, long term care facilities and hospice houses. We wanted you to be aware that this document has also been provided to the Hospice and Palliative Care Federation of Massachusetts (HPCFM). You should also be aware that our organizations will be collaborating on advice and guidance to facilitate the transfer of a deceased hospice patient in the event that a shelter in place order is enacted.

New! Edited Recommendations for Deceased Patient Transfer

We've made a few edits to the document we provided to you yesterday. None of the recommendations have changed, however if you would like an updated copy or you plan to distribute locally, as we recommended, [Click here](#) for the revised copy. You do not need to redistribute this document if you have already done so as a result of these edits but please do use the new version marked (v.03.20.20-2) in the bottom right hand corner for future distribution.

News Reports

Boston Globe Article - A New Norm For Funerals In The Coronavirus Age. Quoted are CR Lyons, Skip Eaton, David Brezniak, Julie Berger, and Glenn Burlamachi. [Click here](#) to read the full article.

Boston Burial Permits - Update on Policy, Procedures and Hours

Jim Imprescia, Administrator Compliance & Credentialing Manager, Burial Permits at the Boston Public Health Commission has announced new hours and procedures for the Boston Burial Permit Office. [Click here](#) for full details.

Archdiocese of Worcester - New Policy for Funerals

The Diocese of Worcester has implemented a new policy for Funerals. The following has been approved by Bishop McManus and distributed to the Priests:

Funeral Masses may be celebrated with the immediate family only (limited to fifteen people) with the appropriate provisions for social distancing and liturgical adaptations provided by the Office for Worship. Families may also be provided with the opportunity to celebrate only the Rites of Committal at the cemetery with a Funeral Mass to be scheduled sometime in the future. Families should be assured that a Mass will, in any case, be offered for the deceased person on the day of their burial.

COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts as of March 20, 2020

The Department of Public Health will post updated information about COVID-19 cases and residents subject to quarantine in Massachusetts by 4 p.m. each day. Please note: per updated CDC guidance, all confirmed or presumptive cases are now categorized simply as positive. You can review today's report by [clicking here](#). For more information you can visit the Department of Public Health's COVID-19 web page by [clicking here](#).