

# **Ensuring Safe and Dignified Care for the Deceased in Powys during Coronavirus**

Powys Teaching Health Board and Powys County Council are working with wider partners to ensure dignified and safe care for the deceased during Coronavirus.

You may be aware that First Minister for Wales recently outlined his expectations that the NHS, local government and funeral services should work together to ensure that additional mortuary capacity is in place across the country.

As the First Minister for Wales made clear in his press conference on Friday 3 April, current mortuary capacity in Wales will not be able to meet the needs of communities in the extraordinary times that we know are coming. He outlined that work is under way across the country with partners to put in place temporary additional capacity.

In Powys we are supporting this national work with the development of a temporary facility on the Wyeside Industrial Estate in Llanelwedd, and this work is driven by a determination to respect human dignity during these challenging times. The temporary facilities will mean that the county can be confident that it has the capacity to provide dignity in death for the people of Powys.

Every effort is being made through social distancing to reduce the number of people affected by coronavirus. But unfortunately, there are still many people contracting and becoming ill with coronavirus. This is resulting in an increase in the number of deaths within Wales and across the UK. Here in Powys we need to prepare for this, and therefore we do need to increase the mortuary capacity in the county. This is particularly important as burials and cremations are also likely to be affected during this time.

We can reassure the people living and working in Powys that any facility of this nature must and will meet very stringent standards in relation to the care of the deceased. Updated national guidance has been published, and we will ensure that this is being followed here in Powys. This will ensure the highest standards of dignity and safety for everyone.

Together our aim is that we never need to use this additional capacity, and absolutely central to achieving this is for all of us to adopt social distancing to reduce the spread of infection.

We also recognise the skills, knowledge and experience that Funeral Directors in Powys have and we are working closely with them to manage the expected increased number of deaths. Critical to making this happen will be how we transport the deceased to this site. Local funeral directors are all highly experienced, thoughtful caring people who are acknowledged for bringing

dignity to the dead and comfort to the bereaved and we are working with them to ensure the facility operates well.

The potential risk of transmission related to the handling of bodies of deceased persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 is low. Public Health England, who are responsible for national coordination, has recently published updated guidance to advise families and mourners, and to guide those who work with the deceased.

We will be ensuring that this guidance is followed here in Powys.

First and foremost we want to ensure that we save lives through coordinated action by health and care services, local communities and all partners. Alongside this it is vital that we ensure dignity in death and support for the bereaved during a difficult time.

More information about the local response to coronavirus is available from:

- Powys Teaching Health Board [www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/coronavirus](http://www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/coronavirus)
- Powys County Council [www.powys.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.powys.gov.uk/coronavirus)

Information and resources to support people at the end of life, and about coping with grief and loss:

- Information and resources from Powys Teaching Health Board [www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/news/52381](http://www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/news/52381)
- Information about coping with grief and loss during Coronavirus <http://www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/1145/Coronavirus%2DBeareavementSupport.pdf>
- Information about My Life My Wishes: [www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/mylifemywishes](http://www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/mylifemywishes)

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## **1. What factors have guided your plans?**

The main consideration at the centre of all of our planning of a temporary mortuary facility has been our shared commitment to ensure dignity in death for everyone in Powys, and support for the bereaved.

Bereavement can be a distressing experience and we want to ensure that we help people at this difficult time.

These are very challenging times for the people of Powys as well as for the funeral sector and it is vital that we ensure we are ready for this.

Alongside this, we are guided by national policies and guidance. These set stringent standards for temporary mortuary facilities. This includes national guidance from Public Health England which is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

We will be ensuring that these standards are met in the development of the temporary mortuary facility in Powys, through our partnership approach with Powys County Council, Funeral Directors and third sector partners.

## **2. Why do we need a temporary mortuary facility?**

Across the world it is very clear that coronavirus is sadly leading to an increase in the number of deaths. Alongside this, coronavirus is also affecting cremations, burials and other services for the deceased.

We know that our existing mortuary facilities are unlikely to have the capacity we need for the challenges ahead. We have therefore taken the necessary but difficult decision to put in place additional temporary mortuary capacity for the people of Powys.

## **3. Where will the temporary mortuary facility be located?**

The temporary mortuary facility will be located in the Wyese Industrial Estates in Llanellwedd near Builth Wells.

## **4. Why was this location chosen?**

A facility of this sensitive nature needs to offer a safe and dignified environment for all concerned. We wanted to ensure that our temporary mortuary facility was available well in advance of being needed. This would give us time to put in place training and procedures that will care for the deceased, be sensitive to the needs of the bereaved, and ensure safety for the staff and local community.

We undertook a rapid assessment to identify locations across the county, and to assess whether a facility of this nature could be established quickly and safely.

## **5. Where will the bodies of the deceased be taken?**

Our aim first and foremost is to offer dignity in death.

For adults (18 and over), wherever possible, the bodies of the deceased will be taken to the undertaker of choice. If this is not possible then our temporary mortuary ensures that we have additional capacity available in the county. We will ensure that all necessary arrangements are in place to work with HM Coroner on the appropriate investigation of unexpected deaths.

For children (under 18), the bodies of the deceased will be taken to the undertaker of choice. We will ensure that all necessary arrangements are in place to work with HM Coroner on the appropriate investigation of unexpected deaths.

## **6. Will the facility be used?**

It is possible that the facility may not need to be used.

If we all follow national guidance to Stay Home we will reduce the spread of infection. This means that fewer people will contract coronavirus, fewer people will become seriously ill, and fewer people will die.

However, it is vital that we plan to have this facility in place as currently we expect that the existing mortuary capacity within Powys will not be sufficient for the challenges ahead.

## **7. What is the capacity of the facility?**

The facility can already accommodate 730 bodies of the deceased.

This could be increased to 900 through additional mobile capacity on the site.

We do not anticipate that we will need to use this capacity. However, it is vital that we plan for the potential worst impact of coronavirus so that we can offer safe and dignified care for the deceased.

## **8. Will it accommodate people from Powys? From other areas?**

This facility is for the people of Powys. Neighbouring areas are putting in place their own plans.

## **9. Are the bodies of people who have died with coronavirus contagious?**

There is little residual hazard, and standard infection control procedures are considered adequate to address any residual hazard.

However, we will be ensuring that there are clear operational procedures in place that provide reassurance to staff and communities that the right steps are being taken to ensure safety and dignity for all concerned.

## **10. Is there specific guidance for communities when managing a death of someone with coronavirus?**

Guidance for communities when managing a death is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

## **11. Is there specific guidance for residential care settings when managing a death of someone with coronavirus?**

Guidance for residential care settings when managing a death is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

## **12. Is there specific guidance for members of the public who identify a death of someone with coronavirus?**

Guidance for members of the public when identifying a death is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

## **13. Is there specific guidance for GPs when managing a death of someone with coronavirus?**

Guidance for GPs when managing a death is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

## **14. Is there specific guidance for first responders when managing a death of someone with coronavirus?**

Guidance for first responders when managing a death is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

## **15. How will bodies be stored?**

Public Health England advises that body bags are not deemed necessary for the purposes of control of infection as there is a low residual risk of infection. However, robust body bags will be used to aid with safe and dignified storage.

## **16. How long will bodies be stored at the facility?**

Bodies will be stored at the facility for as short as possible.

There are several steps involved in the care of the deceased. This includes the capacity of funeral director services, cremation, and burial facilities, alongside the continuing impact of social distancing. These services are being affected by COVID19, which will lead to some delays. However, local bodies are working with Welsh Government to seek to ensure that services can continue to be delivered safely with minimal delay.

We recognise that this can be an anxious time for the bereaved, and we are working with the whole funeral sector to reduce delay.

## **17. Will post mortems be carried out on site or anywhere within the vicinity**

No.

If there is a requirement for a post-mortem this will be performed at a hospital mortuary and in accordance with relevant guidance and legislation related to this.

## **18. Will visiting be possible?**

Sadly not.

The nature of a temporary facility means that it will not offer a environment for relatives to visit the deceased.

## **19. How will coronavirus affect funeral arrangements?**

Sadly, coronavirus will have an impact on practice arrangements for funerals. Welsh Government has produced guidance to help people at this difficult time. This is available from their website at

<https://gov.wales/attending-funerals-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

Detailed guidance from Welsh Government to local authorities is also available from <https://gov.wales/covid-19-guidance-local-authorities-funerals>

## **20. What is the infection risk to the local community?**

The risk to the local community is very small indeed.

The greatest risk to the local community is not from this facility, but from wider community transmission.

It is vital that everyone follows the guidance to stay home:

- only go outside for food, health reasons or essential work
- stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people
- wash your hands frequently

In addition, the procedures outlined below will further minimise the risk of transmitting any infection.

## **21. What is the infection risk to the staff, including those transporting or handling bodies?**

The greatest risk to the staff is not from this facility, but from wider community transmission.

It is vital that everyone follows the guidance to stay home:

- only go outside for food, health reasons or essential work
- stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people
- wash your hands frequently

The safety and wellbeing of everyone working on the site is of paramount importance and we will ensure that training, procedures and facilities are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all staff. This will include:

- Safe management of the environment
- Handling the deceased and assessment for infection risk
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Hand washing
- Safe management of equipment
- Safe management of blood and body fluid spillages
- Occupational safety: prevention and exposure management (including sharps)
- Safe management of linen

More detailed information is provided later in this document.

## **22. What arrangements will be in place for religious and cultural observance?**

The national guidance has been developed after discussion with faith leaders and includes guidance on practices that involve close contact with the body <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

When bodies are released for burial or cremation what protection will there be for both the personnel and our residents?

The main risk of infection during burial or cremation would be between those present rather than from the deceased.

The key protections therefore include:

- restricting the number of mourners who attend so that a safe distance of at least 2 metres (6ft) can be maintained between individuals
- mourners should also follow the advice on social distancing when travelling to and from the funeral gathering.
- individuals who have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), or who are part of a household where someone has symptoms, or who are vulnerable to severe infection should not participate in rituals or religious gatherings
- mourners should not take part in rituals or practices that bring them into close contact with the body. Contact with the body should be restricted to those who are wearing PPE and have been trained in the appropriate use of PPE

More specific guidance is available for funeral practices that involved close contact with the body.

## **23. How will the facility be staffed?**

We will have a dedicated team of trained staff for this temporary facility. All staff will have initial training as well as ongoing refresher training to ensure that they are fully familiar with the safe and dignified procedures we will have in place. The majority of staff are people currently employed by Powys County Council who have generously responded to an invitation for redeployment.

In addition, there will be 24-hour security in place to ensure a safe and secure environment for the deceased.

## **24. What plans are in place in Powys for the care of the living?**

Powys Teaching Health Board has a robust five point plan in place covering:

- Stay Home Save Lives
- Self Care, Families and Support
- Powys Primary Care
- Powys Community Care
- Strong Acute and Specialist Care Partnerships

This plan already includes 100 additional beds across the county to provide more care closer to home. This plan includes using our hospital and health & care facilities to provide care in the county for people both with and without COVID19, and overall our plans will enable us to care for sicker people in the county than is normally the case, and to bring patients back into the county safely and swiftly when they no longer need the more specialist care provided under the supervision of consultant intensivists, consultant respiratory physicians and other highly skilled professionals in our network of neighbouring acute hospitals.

More information is available from the Powys Teaching Health Board website at [www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/coronavirus-response](http://www.powysthb.wales.nhs.uk/coronavirus-response)

## **25. Will this be a burial site?**

This will absolutely not be a burial site, and there are categorically no plans for a burial site. This will provide a temporary mortuary facility before bodies are released for cremation or burial.

## **26. What about guidance in other countries?**

We are following guidance from the UK's leading scientists, including in Public Health Wales and Public Health England, to help us provide safe and dignified care for the deceased, and to safeguard everyone involved in the care of the deceased. This guidance is kept under review nationally in the UK, setting standards for local services.

## **27. Have your response arrangements changed?**

It is absolutely right that our response arrangements will continue to change.

The current coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented public health emergency. This means that the UK is constantly reviewing and learning from experience both here and abroad. The different steps we are all taking to response to coronavirus – including Staying At Home – mean that the impact of coronavirus will also be changing. Our local response in Powys needs to reflect this.

## 28. Are bodies contagious: detailed information

There is little residual hazard, and standard infection control procedures are considered adequate to address any residual hazard.

Public Health England's (PHE's) Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory has assessed the post-mortem risk from people who have died of coronavirus (SARS-CoV2) infection and has identified little residual hazard apart from:

- potential droplet generation from artificial air movement during the initial care of the deceased
- post-mortem examination where the use of power tools take place, which is a risk for aerosol generation

It is estimated that viable virus could be present for up to 48 to 72 hours on environmental surfaces in "room air" conditions. In deceased bodies, particularly those retained at refrigeration conditions, and depending on the above factors, infectious virus may persist for longer and testing for suspected cases should be considered.

Due to the consolidation of respiratory secretions and rapid degradation of the virus when not sustained by live tissues, residual hazard from body fluid spillage will not present a risk. Therefore, body bags are not deemed necessary but may be used for other practical reasons. Placing a cloth or mask over the mouth of the deceased when moving them can help to prevent the release of aerosols.

The principles of Standard Infection Control Precautions and Transmission Based Precautions continue to apply while deceased individuals remain in the care environment.

This is due to the ongoing risk of infectious transmission via contact, although the risk is usually lower than for living patients. Where the deceased was known or suspected to have been infected with coronavirus (SARS-CoV2), there is no requirement for a body bag, and viewing, hygienic preparations, post-mortem and embalming are all permitted when undertaken by professionals trained in handling bodies of the deceased.

Further information is available in the national guidance from Public Health England which is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

## 29. Precautions for people transporting or handling bodies: detailed information

The safety and wellbeing of everyone working on the site is of paramount importance and we will ensure that training, procedures and facilities are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all staff.

WHO guidance indicates that personnel interacting with the bodies of covid 19 patients should apply standard procedures including hand hygiene and the use of appropriate PPE. Detailed procedures for site staff are being concluded with clinical advice being provided by PTHB.

Noting that the safety and well-being of everyone working on site is the first priority. Before attending to a body, people should ensure that the necessary hand hygiene and personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies are available

The training requirements for staff working in the temporary body store are also being jointly identified and delivered by both PCC and PTHB.

Standard infection control precautions (SICPs) have been developed to manage the risks of infection from patients in healthcare settings, but they are also applicable as a means of controlling the risks of infection from the deceased.

SICPs are the basic infection prevention and control measures that should be used at all times, whether infection is known to be present or not, to ensure the safety of workers and visitors.

SICPs are a combination of organisational arrangements, safe working practices, use of PPE, and the application of appropriate behaviours.

Their application should take account of the task being performed, the level of interaction and/or the anticipated level of exposure to blood and/or other body fluids.

SICPs can be categorised into nine areas which are applicable to work with the deceased:

- Safe management of the environment
- Handling the deceased and assessment for infection risk
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Hand washing
- Safe management of equipment
- Safe management of blood and body fluid spillages
- Occupational safety: prevention and exposure management (including sharps)
- Safe management of linen

PPE will be provided for staff working in the body store within the temporary body store.

All PPE should be:

- Compliant with the relevant BS/EN standards (European technical standards as adopted in the UK)
- Located close to the point of use
- Stored to prevent contamination in a clean/dry area until required for use (expiry dates must be adhered to)
- Changed as directed following completion of a procedure or task
- Disposed of after use into the correct waste stream i.e. healthcare/clinical waste.

Bodies will be transported and stored in body bags which are constructed from material that is air tight and water proof. In the unlikely event that there is a leakage from these bags, a supply of full cleaning equipment and PPE will be available on site.

As well as carrying out routine cleaning, arrangements must be in place to deal with spillages of blood and other body fluids. This is unlikely to occur in the temporary body store as no post mortems or tissue sampling will be undertaken on the premises. Spillages need to be dealt with promptly and in line with safe working practices.

The appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) will protect staff clothing from contamination in most circumstances.

Theatre scrubs will be provided for all staff working on site staff but who are likely to come into close contact with bodies or undertakers. Changing areas are provided for staff to change into uniforms on arrival at work.

The site procedures will specify that staff working in the storage area should change into and out of workwear at work and not wear them when travelling. This is based on public perception rather than evidence of an infection risk.

When changing at work, uniforms should be transported home in a disposable plastic bag. This bag should be disposed of into the household waste stream.

Uniforms should be laundered:

- Separately from other household linen
- In a load not more than half the machine capacity
- At the maximum temperature the fabric can tolerate, then ironed or tumbled-dried.

A clean general area is set aside where staff can take breaks, and prepare and eat food and drink (e.g. a staff room). This is separate from the body storage areas and staff are not allowed to take breaks in body storage areas.