



Department of Health

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Commissioner

LISA J. PINO, M.A., J.D.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

Date: October 23, 2020

To: Medical Examiners, Coroners and/or Coroner Physicians

Guidance for post-mortem COVID-19 and Influenza testing

Dear Medical Examiners, Coroners, and Coroner Physicians:

On September 1, 2020, emergency amendments to New York State Title 10 Codes, Rules and Regulations were put into effect mandating post-mortem testing of decedents suspected of having suffered the effects of either COVID-19 or influenza, to be performed within 48 hours of death if no such test was performed in the 14 days prior to death.

For New York State to effectively differentiate COVID-19 and influenza related fatalities, testing must occur whenever a patient or decedent is suspected of having either illness. In the event of an unattended death where such testing was not already performed, it is vital for the coroner, coroner physician, or medical examiner to not only perform the test, but to refrain from including a probable or presumed cause of death on a death certificate without corroboration. Whenever possible, the results of COVID-19 and influenza tests must be accounted for in death certificates to ensure that they are as accurate as possible.

Medical Examiners, Coroner and Coroner Physicians can request Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card for the purpose of conducting SARS-CoV-2 antigen testing on decedents by contacting Dr. Anne Walsh at anne.walsh@health.ny.gov.

The ability of the Department to collate accurate data measuring the true severity of these contagions depends on the integrity of this underlying diagnostic evidence. The future success of our containment and mitigation strategies against the COVID-19 epidemic depends on your ability to accurately reflect COVID-19 and influenza causes of death, verified by medical expertise and testing.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (518) 474-5245.

Sincerely,

Diana A. Yang
New York State Registrar
Acting Director, Bureau of Vital Records