



## **GUIDELINES REGARDING THE REPATRIATION OF THE REMAINS OF UGANDANS WHO DIE ABROAD**

Please find attached, herewith, an update on guidelines regarding returning the remains of deceased Ugandan Nationals from abroad.

Those who wish to do so are advised to pay particular attention to the requirements for the importation of bodies as outlined on page 4 of the document.

**UGANDA HIGH COMMISSION, LONDON**

**24<sup>th</sup> June 2020**



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

**GUIDELINES FOR SAFE HANDLING OF BODIES  
BEING REPATRIATED OUT OF UGANDA DURING  
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

April 2020

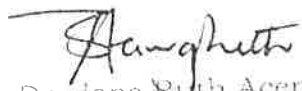
## PREFACE

On 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2020, the WHO declared the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. Uganda reported its first confirmed case on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2020. All the countries bordering Uganda have reported confirmed COVID-19 cases with evidence of community transmission in some countries. Globally the WHO risk assessment for this pandemic is very high.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a considerable death toll and has raised questions regarding the repatriation of human remains where the person died of the disease overseas. Generally human remains are not infectious and do not transmit disease. However, cadavers of persons who have died from contagious diseases may pose risk of transmission, but at a lower level than from living individuals except for viral hemorrhagic fever and prion diseases

In view of this global risk, and the considerable death toll from COVID-19, the government of Uganda developed this interim guidance for all those, including managers of health care facilities and mortuaries, religious and public health authorities, and families, who may require guidance on the repatriation of human remains from Uganda during the COVID-19 outbreak. Repatriating human remains is a complicated process involving the cooperation and coordination of various stakeholders on several levels to ensure that it is conducted efficiently and in compliance with relevant international and national regulations and the Ministry of Health is providing guidance through this document.

This document is informed by current knowledge of the COVID-19 outbreak and by considerations undertaken in response to other respiratory pathogens, including the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS)-CoV and influenza viruses. The Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Health will continue to update these recommendations as new information becomes available.  
I am grateful to all individuals and partners who have contributed to the development of these guidelines.



Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng  
**MINISTER OF HEALTH**

**Background:**

COVID-19 is a viral infection is causing a worldwide outbreak that started in late 2019. As of 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020, it had killed more than 145,000 people globally. It spreads readily between individuals when droplets from the mouth or nose of an infected person fall on another person's mouth, nose or eyes. The virus containing droplets may also settle on an object and then transferred by hands to the mouth, nose or eyes to cause infection.

According to interim guidance released by the WHO on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, COVID-19 is not categorized as one of the infections for which transmission by dead bodies is very high. However, given the very high transmissibility of the virus in communities, there is need for caution while handling bodies of persons dying during the COVID-19 pandemic. This guideline outlines the process of safe repatriation of bodies of persons that have died in Uganda to their countries.

**Key safety issues:**

The key elements of safe handling of COVID-19 bodies are:

- Limiting of handling of COVID-19 bodies to a minimum (for example no touching by family members)
- Use of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment when handling bodies
- Use of well-ventilated spaces when handling bodies
- Ensuring personnel handling a COVID-19 are trained in appropriate precautions
- Sensitizing the community on taking appropriate precautions when organizing and attending funerals
- Respecting religious and cultural rights while minimizing risk of infection

Guidance on the various aspects of body management is summarized in the table below

Activity	Guideline
Personal protective equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any person directly handling the body during various procedures (e.g. last offices, transportation, autopsy, packaging) should don full personal protective equipment for droplet and contact precautions including - scrubs, disposable gown, waterproof apron, boots, filtering face piece respirator (N-95 or FFP2 mask), eye protection, head/hair protection</li></ul>
Ventilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any manipulation of the body should be in a well-ventilated space. For this period, Mulago Hospital Mortuary, K.C.CA Mortuary and Regional Referral Hospital Mortuaries shall be used</li></ul>

Hand hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict hand hygiene – before donning PPE, after doffing PPE, upon touching surfaces, after any procedures</li> </ul>
Cleaning and decontamination of surfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surfaces or materials that come into contact with the body or materials from the body should be decontaminated with 0.1% hypochlorite solution</li> <li>• If the surfaces are visibly soiled, they should be cleaned with soap and water then decontaminated with 0.1% hypochlorite</li> </ul>
Last offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be in full PPE and well ventilated room (as described above)</li> <li>• Remove any tubing's like lines and catheters</li> <li>• Pack orifices to ensure that any leakages are contained</li> <li>• Wrap body in a waterproof Body</li> <li>• Discard any waste in the sharps and highly infectious waste container as appropriate</li> <li>• Decontaminate the surfaces</li> <li>• Perform hand hygiene</li> </ul>
Transfer to the mortuary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person transferring the body should have apt PPE as above</li> <li>• Use the most accessible designated route to the mortuary</li> </ul>
Vehicle for Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Vehicle should have cleanable surfaces</li> <li>• Vehicle should be disinfected before and after transportation</li> <li>• Vehicle should be one that is enclosed. Open vehicles will not be allowed for transportation. There should be an airtight seal between the driver section and the cargo section in which the body is transported</li> <li>• No persons other than the driver and his assistant shall be allowed in the vehicle carrying the body</li> </ul>
Autopsy	<p>For autopsies the following precautions should be taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well ventilated autopsy room – (As above)</li> <li>• Personnel – Limit personnel to a minimum and use preferably the most experienced personnel</li> <li>• Use Apt full PPE as above</li> <li>• Clean and decontaminate surfaces (as above)</li> <li>• Perform hand hygiene as above</li> <li>• In case COVID-19 is suspected partial autopsy is recommended. Collect samples to confirm COVID-19 by PCR</li> </ul>
Embalming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embalming shall be done by trained personnel in full PPE at the Mulago Hospital Mortuary, K.C.C.A Mortuary and Regional Referral Hospital Mortuaries</li> </ul>

Viewing of the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viewing of the body by family members shall be by photography</li> <li>• Family members should not touch the body</li> </ul>
Packaging of the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body wrapped in a waterproof body bag then placed in a zinc lined coffin and an outer metal or wooden box</li> </ul>
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical Certificate of Cause of Death</li> <li>• Post-mortem report or Comprehensive Medical Report from the attending doctor/health facility</li> <li>• Embalming certificate</li> <li>• Public Health Certificate from the District Health Officer/ KCCA Director of Health and Environment</li> <li>• Copy of passport/identification document of the deceased (The original passport /travel document/identification document to be presented to immigration authorities)</li> <li>• Clearing letter from home embassy</li> <li>• Import license/import authorization from the recipient country's Health Authorities</li> <li>• <u>Death Notification/ Certificate from NIRA</u></li> </ul>
Importation of bodies	<p>Current policy is that bodies should not be repatriated to Uganda during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in the event that exception is granted. The following should be observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body should be packaged in a waterproof body bag and placed in a zinc lined airtight coffin (and an outer metal or wooden box for bodies transported by air)</li> <li>• The bodies should be accompanied by the following documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Medical Certificate of Cause of Death</li> <li>◦ Post-mortem report or Comprehensive Medical Report from the attending doctor/health facility</li> <li>◦ Embalming certificate</li> <li>◦ Copy of passport/identification document of the deceased</li> <li>◦ The original passport (travel document/identification document) to be presented to immigration authorities for cancellation as applicable</li> <li>◦ Copy of letter authorizing repatriation to Uganda from the Director General of Health Services</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Opening of the body if necessary, including removal of outer box, removal for zinc lined coffins shall be done at Mulago National Hospital or the Regional Referral Hospital under supervision of the Hospital Director</li> <li>• Burial shall be supervised by trained burial teams*</li> </ul>

\* Not necessary now  
unless body  
categorized as  
infectious  
- 22/6/20

Verification of packaging and documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verification of package content at points of entry shall be by scanning at customs at points of entry</li> <li>• Documents shall be verified by the customs, medical and immigration officials at the point of entry</li> </ul>
Storage of bodies outside Uganda by border communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation of bodies out of the country for temporary storage (as often occurs for border communities) shall not be accepted. Any bodies transported out shall NOT be accepted back into the country</li> </ul>

**References:**

1. World Health Organization (2020): Infection Prevention and Control for the safe management of a dead body in the context of COVID-19: Interim Guidance 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2020

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