

## Viral Haemorrhagic Fever (VHF) Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Post-Mortem Examinations

Version 0.2

VHF can be transmitted in post-mortem care settings:

- By laceration and puncture with contaminated instruments used during post-mortem care
- Through direct handling of human remains without appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and
- Through splashes of blood or other body fluids e.g. urine, saliva, faeces to unprotected mucosa e.g. eyes, mouth or nose which occur during post-mortem care
- Only personnel trained in handling infected human remains and wearing PPE should touch or move VHF-infected remains
- Where possible, post-mortem examinations of a suspected VHF patient's remains should be limited to essential examinations only

### Post Mortem Examinations

- Infection prevention and control (IPC) staff should be consulted for any decision making on post-mortem examinations.

#### VHF confirmed ante-mortem:

- **A post-mortem should NOT be performed on a person known to have confirmed VHF ante-mortem.**

### Suspected VHF ante-mortem - NO high risk exposure:

In the situation where the death has occurred but a diagnosis of VHF is NOT CONFIRMED ante-mortem and there is **not a high risk of VHF exposure**, consult with the National Isolation Unit (NIU), Mater Hospital prior to proceeding with the post mortem examination or taking samples. The telephone contact details for the NIU at the Mater Hospital are 01 830 1122 and ask for the ID consultant on call. See also [VHF Risk Assessment Algorithm for use in Hospital Settings](#).

### Suspected VHF ante-mortem - HIGH risk exposure

In the situation where the death has occurred but the diagnosis of VHF is NOT CONFIRMED ante-mortem, yet VHF is highly likely i.e. **High risk of VHF Exposure**

- Consult with the National Virus Reference laboratory (NVRL) prior to taking samples from the human remains in order to determine the extent of the limited amount of sampling that will suffice for an assessment. See [VHF Risk Assessment hospital algorithm](#) for NVRL contact details.
- Following discussion, blood and urine samples may be taken as agreed from the human remains and tested for VHF. This will also assist in establishing an alternative diagnosis e.g. malaria.

The following precautions should be taken while taking post-mortem samples from both NO and HIGH risk exposure suspected VHF cases:

- Personnel examining remains which include taking blood and urine samples should wear the following personal protective equipment (PPE): surgical scrub suit, surgical cap, eye protection (e.g. face shield or goggles), fluid resistant surgical facemask, double surgical gloves, disposable impervious gown with long sleeves, and closed shoes or boots. Enhanced PPE (e.g. leg and shoe coverings) is determined by assessing the risk of heavy exposure to blood and body fluids.
- PPE should be in place before contact with the body, worn during the process of collection and placement of body bags and should be removed immediately after and discarded into the UN2814 healthcare risk waste container
- When removing PPE, avoid any contact between soiled gloves or equipment and the face (i.e. eyes, nose or mouth)
- Hand hygiene should be performed immediately following the removal of PPE

#### **Management and Transport of Specimens**

- Place specimens in clearly-labelled, non-glass, leak-proof containers and deliver to the National Virus Reference Laboratory in UCD as per local arrangements e.g. via the Microbiology laboratory.
- All external surfaces of specimen containers should be thoroughly disinfected (using an effective disinfectant) prior to transport.
- For full details on collection, packaging and transport of clinical specimens, see [VHF Infection, Prevention and Control Guidance](#).
- Tissue or body fluids for disposal should be carefully placed in clearly marked, sealed containers for incineration.

**If the results of post-mortem blood and/or urine samples are positive for VHF  
- A POST-MORTEM SHOULD NOT BE PERFORMED**

**If the results of post-mortem samples blood and/or urine are negative for  
VHF - Continue with a post-mortem as per normal procedure**

#### **References:**

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