

Viral Haemorrhagic Fevers Guidance Note for Funeral Directors/Coroners

Version 0.2

Viral haemorrhagic fever agents (VHFs) are types of viral diseases that may cause a bleeding syndrome in humans. VHFs of particular concern however are those that have shown the chance for person-to-person spread. These are: Ebola, Marburg, Lassa fever and other Arenaviruses, and Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever. While the likelihood of VHF appearing in Ireland is low, it is crucial that all sections of the healthcare system that might have possible contact are aware of the small likelihood and prepare accordingly.

Transmission of the virus occurs from person to person through direct contact with blood and other body fluids. These remain infectious for a considerable period after death.

It is a possibility, but extremely small, that a patient with VHF may first present after death and it is important that Funeral Directors, their staff and Coroners are aware of this very unlikely eventuality.

VHF can be transmitted in post-mortem care settings, particularly through piercing injuries from contaminated instruments, through handling of human remains without [appropriate personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) and through splashes of blood and other body fluids into the eyes, nose and mouth. If VHF is confirmed in a patient **a post-mortem should not be performed.**

HPSC has produced a guidance document, "[Management of Deceased Individuals Harboring Infectious Diseases](#)" and this lays out the necessary precautions to minimise the potential infectious risks presented by human remains. One important element of these guidelines recommends a move towards the use of the [Notification of Death \(NoD\) Form](#) by certifying medical practitioners. It is recommended that the NoD Form is used whenever human remains are being transferred from medical care to the care of a Funeral Director. It is intended that this form is completed for all deaths.

When confronted with an unexplained death or human remains about which there is no available medical history, the following precautionary steps should be taken:

1. From relatives, it is imperative to outrule a history of the deceased having undertaken foreign travel with the previous 21 days. This **especially** applies to [areas currently affected by the current VHF outbreak](#)
2. If foreign travel to the areas affected by the VHF outbreak in the previous 21 days cannot be outruled, then you **should not undertake any preparation of the body and no post-mortem should be directed or undertaken** until you can satisfy yourself that the remains do not pose a risk of VHF.

Further information is available from the [HPSC website](#) at or from your local [Department of Public Health](#).