SUBJECT: COVID-19 REPORTING TO THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER DEPARTMENT

Because the viral disease COVID-19 has been determined to be a public health emergency, I am writing to clarify the Hillsborough County Medical Examiner’s role during this outbreak and provide transport guidance in an effort to minimize exposure. The Hillsborough County Medical Examiner (District 13) ("ME") is responsible for the generation of death certificates in all cases where a death has occurred AND the decedent has tested positive for COVID-19. I anticipate you will be dealing with three types of scenarios:

Scenario One: If the decedent was confirmed COVID-19 positive before death, in the majority of cases, no autopsy and no transport to the ME’s Department will be necessary. The ME will accept jurisdiction and generate a death certificate based on a review of the medical records unless an autopsy is required. If it is not, the body may be released directly to the funeral home.

Scenario Two: In cases where COVID-19 swabs have been taken, but results are still pending, the ME’s Department will determine jurisdiction upon receipt of the test results. We ask that you please notify our office with the results of anyone who has passed away at your facility as soon as possible. Prior to receipt of the test results, the body may either remain in the facility morgue (if available) or an ME Death Investigator can authorize release to a funeral home.

Scenario Three: In the event of a death occurring at home, or places other than medical facilities or home hospice, and no testing has been performed, but there is suspicion for a COVID-19 related death, the deceased shall be transported to our office for external examination. We will obtain samples for COVID-19 testing and submit to the Florida Department of Health Tampa Branch Laboratory. After we have obtained the necessary samples, we will release the body to the funeral home designated by next of kin.

Our doctors and death investigators are available 24 hours a day. Please stay safe and well.

ME Contact Number: 813-914-4567

Best regards,
Kelly Devers, M.D.