

Body Care and Disposal

Written by [Kylene](#) in [Sanitation](#)

Approx Reading Time: 3 minutes

The greatest respect should be given to the care and handling of bodies. In some disasters, especially in the aftermath of natural disasters, there may be bodies that require appropriate disposal. Every consideration should be given to the families and loved ones of the deceased. Bodies should be cared for with reverence and respect.



Exposure to dead bodies does not usually present a serious health hazard. Whenever possible, bodies should be cared for and buried or cremated in ways which are conducive to the family's cultural and religious practices.

The widespread belief that corpses pose a risk of communicable disease is wrong. Especially if death resulted from trauma, bodies are quite unlikely to cause outbreaks of diseases such as typhoid fever, cholera, or plague. However bodies may transmit gastroenteritis or food poisoning syndrome to survivors if they contaminate streams, wells, or other water sources.

The primary problems associated with dead bodies is social and political, not health-related. Do not be afraid to care for a body that has died incident to a natural disaster. However, if the person died of an infectious disease special precautions should be taken.

The psychological trauma of losing loved ones and witnessing death is great cause for concern. It is important to collect bodies quickly to minimize distress. However, it is not necessary to rush their burial or cremation. It is important to allow the bereaved time to carry out the ceremonial or cultural practices that normally occur after death.

In most situations, it is appropriate to wait and bury the dead in a traditional cemetery. However, if a body must be buried consider ground water location and bury the body at least 5 feet above water table. The body should be placed in a body bag, coffin, wrapped in plastic sheeting or thick black garbage bag to keep remains separate from dirt. Place at least 3-4 feet of dirt over the body to prevent it from being disturbed.

Bodies should be buried appropriately. A dead body will produce a large amount of liquid. Placing the body in a body bag or several layers of garbage bags (and sealing with tape) may prevent liquids from leaking out and reduce the smells of the body decomposing until proper burial arrangements can be made.



Use care to protect the body from animals until it can be buried appropriately. Wear rubber gloves when handling a body and be sure to practice good hand washing!