



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## GUIDELINES ON MANAGEMENT OF CORONAVIRUS OR COVID-19 HEALTH CARE WASTE

### A. DEFINITIONS

#### A.1 INFECTIOUS WASTE<sup>i</sup>

Means waste which is suspected to contain pathogens; and which normally causes or significantly contributes to the cause of increased morbidity or mortality of human beings.

#### A.2 ISOLATION WASTE<sup>ii</sup>

Means waste containing discarded materials contaminated with excretion, exudates, or secretions from humans or animals who or which are required to be isolated (by the infection control staff, the attending physician or surgeon, the attending veterinarian, or the local health practitioner) in order to protect others from highly communicable or zoonotic diseases.

### B. HEALTH CARE FACILITIES (PUBLIC AND PRIVATE)

- The waste stream generated from isolation units/wards during the care of **COVID-19** patients shall be treated as isolation waste which is part of Category A infectious substances and handled as health care risk waste (HCRW).
- The waste shall be safely disposed of in doubled bagged (red liners) using designated single use box sets (50L or 142L) and tied when full.
- The designated single use box sets shall be marked "**COVID-19**" and labelled with the bio-hazard symbol/sign.
- The designated single use box sets including the double bags shall be properly sealed prior to internal collection.
- ¾ full sealed box sets shall be removed and stored at the central storage area prior to collection for treatment and disposal.
- Health Care Waste Officers/designated representatives shall witness collection at all times of the waste.
- A separate waste manifest document shall be made available to the health care facility indicating the volumes of **COVID-19** waste removed.
- The waste shall be collected and transported with other health care risk waste streams/categories provided it is clearly identified and marked "**COVID-19**".
- The collection, removal and transportation of the waste shall be provided by the appointed or contracted service provider.

- The treatment and disposal of the waste must be conducted at a licensed HCRW treatment and disposal facility.
- However, the use of non-burn technologies must only be at treatment facilities where shredding is either part of an enclosed treatment process or occurs after treatment of the waste to minimize potential release and/or exposure of staff or personnel to **COVID-19**.
- All who handle health care waste should wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and perform/observe hand hygiene practices.

### **C. MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 WASTE FOR PATIENTS UNDER INVESTIGATION**

- The waste stream generated in Emergency Departments during the care of suspected **COVID-19** patients shall be handled as health care risk waste.
- The waste shall be safely disposed of in doubled bagged (red liners) using the designated single use box sets (50L or 142L) and marked "**Suspected COVID-19**".
- A temporary room or storage area shall be identified to store the waste for "**Suspected COVID-19**".
- If the patient tests **NEGATIVE** for **COVID-19**, then the waste shall be handled as normal/regular health care risk waste (infectious waste) instead of isolation waste.
- If the patient tests **POSITIVE** for **COVID-19**, the waste shall be handled as isolation waste.
- All the other requirements as mentioned in **B** above shall be adhered to.

### **D. DESIGNATED QUARANTINE FACILITIES**

- All health care waste produced including masks, gloves, etc shall be treated as health care risk waste as per **SANS 10248-1:2008**.
- Provinces shall utilize the contracted/appointed service provider for that particular province to collect, remove, transport, treat and dispose of waste generated in the designated quarantine facility.
- All waste generated by quarantine individuals, staff, personnel and health care workers must be treated as health care risk waste.
- All the other requirements as mentioned in **B** above shall be adhered to.

### **E. POINTS OF ENTRY (LAND, SEA AND AIR)**

- All health care waste generated including masks, gloves, etc shall be treated as health care risk waste as per **SANS 10248-1:2008**.
- Port Health Authority shall utilize the contracted or appointed service provider to collect, remove, transport, treat and dispose of waste generated at the specific point of entry.
- All waste generated by suspected or confirmed travellers of **COVID-19**, staff, personnel and health care workers must be treated as health care risk waste.
- All the other requirements as mentioned in **B** above shall be adhered to.

### **F. SELF ISOLATION/QUARANTINE AT HOMES**

- Health care waste generated from possible cases and cleaning of areas where possible cases have been (including disposable cloths, tissues, gloves, masks, etc) shall be regarded as health care risk waste and placed in a red liner and tied when full.
- The red liner shall then be placed in a second red liner and tied.

- It shall be placed in a suitable and secure place and marked for storage until the individual's test results are known.
- Health care waste produced shall be placed in the suspect or patient's room awaiting collection.
- One should **NOT** place the waste in communal waste areas.
- If the individual test is negative, the waste shall be handled as normal health care risk waste (infectious waste) instead of isolation waste.
- If the individual test is positive, then the waste shall be handled as isolation waste.
- Provincial/District Health Office or Municipal Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) shall arrange for collection of the waste.
- The health care worker (designated community health worker or other any health personnel) shall collect and transport the waste to the nearest public health facility for collection by the appointed or contracted service provider prior to treatment and disposal.
- Proper hand hygiene practices must be performed/observed during and after the removal of the waste.

#### **G. WORKPLACES/OFFICES AND PUBLIC PLACES**

- All waste generated including masks, gloves, paper towels, etc shall be treated as health care general waste as per **SANS 10248-1:2008**.
- The waste shall be placed in plastic rubbish bags and tied when full.
- These plastic rubbish bags shall be placed with the normal health care waste generated for collection, removal, transportation and disposal by the relevant municipality.
- If health screening measures are exercised at workplaces/offices, all waste generated shall be treated as health care risk waste as per **SANS 10248-1:2008**.
- If waste is treat as health care risk waste, all the other requirements as mentioned in **B** above shall be adhered to.
- Proper hand hygiene practices must be performed/observed during and after the removal of the waste.

#### **H. REPORTING AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL WHERE UNLAWFUL DISPOSAL OF HEALTH CARE RISK WASTE (HCRW) IS DETECTED**

Considering the serious public health issues associated with **COVID-19**, the default approach to any instance where the unlawfully disposed of HCRW is detected is to remove the risk from the environment immediately. Given the uncertainties in relation to the origin of this HCRW, and despite the scale of the unlawfully disposed of waste, it will be managed as though it is contaminated by **COVID-19**. Since the environmental authority's<sup>1</sup> regularly undertakes investigations in relation to any breaches of the National Environmental Management: Waste Act, 2008 (Act No. 59 of 2008), it would be prudent at this time, and considering the capacity limitations that exists within the health authorities to adopt the following protocol:

- Any instance of unlawfully disposed of HCRW that is reported to the environmental authorities must be submitted to the National Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF);
- DEFF will communicate these reports to the relevant officials concerned with the management of HCRW at the National Department of Health;

---

<sup>1</sup>Environmental authorities consist of: National Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, the nine Provincial Environmental Departments responsible for Environmental Affairs and the conservation authorities (both National and Provincial).

- The National Department of Health will issue an instruction to the contracted or appointed service providers who are lawfully permitted to collect HCRW on behalf of the Provincial Departments of Health to respond to the area where the unlawful disposal was detected;
- The HCRW must be collected with minimal direct handling and it must be placed in adequately sized containers;
- Any information and/or evidence that could link the unlawfully disposed waste to a perpetrator must be photographed and sent to the DEFF coordinator who will then ensure that the necessary criminal investigations ensue; and
- In consultation with DEFF, the disposal option identified will depend on each individual circumstance.

**N.B.** Provincial/District Health Office or Municipal EHPs shall ensure proper monitoring of the collection, removal, transportation, treatment and disposal of the waste.

Municipal EHPs shall conduct proper and thorough investigations of all suspected and/ or confirmed cases of COVID-19.

30 March 2020

---

<sup>i</sup> Gauteng Health Care Waste Management Regulations, 2004

<sup>ii</sup> Gauteng Health Care Waste Management Regulations, 2004