



Department
of Health &
Social Care



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To: Medical directors and HR directors at acute trusts, CCGs, PCNs, STPs, mental health trusts, community trusts

7 July 2020

Dear colleague,

Deaths of healthcare and social care workers who contracted the coronavirus

On 29 May 2020, the Secretary of State [wrote to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee](#) describing a process for investigating the deaths of healthcare and social care workers who died after contracting the coronavirus. This letter provides information about the process and what it means for NHS organisations.

As part of their independent scrutiny, medical examiners consider whether death may have been caused by disease acquired in employment. When they suspect a health service or social care worker acquired coronavirus infection in the course of employment, NHS England and NHS Improvement will ensure the employer is aware of the staff fatality. This will enable the employer to consider if it has an obligation to notify the death to the Health and Safety Executive, in accordance with the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). In cases where medical examiners find coroners have opened investigations, medical examiner scrutiny will end.

The Department of Health and Social Care has issued the [Health Service and Social Care Workers \(Scrutiny of Coronavirus-related Deaths\) Directions 2020](#) on the basis that the incidence of coronavirus in England constitutes an emergency for the

purposes of section 253(1) of the National Health Service Act (2006). These directions require NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts to co-operate with each other and others providing NHS services, to ensure that medical examiners are made available to scrutinise staff deaths from COVID-19. The directions will apply to any deaths which occurred before they came into force as well as deaths that occur afterwards, and will be reviewed in December 2020 to see whether they need to be retained, with further reviews every six months.

There is more information about medical examiners [here](#), and the National Medical Examiner's office can be contacted at nme@nhs.net. We will contact organisations affected with more detail as soon as possible. General information about medical examiners' role in this process is attached for your information.

Yours sincerely,



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