



**Department of Public Health
Emergency Medical Services Agency**

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Policy #: 530.00
Effective Date: 09/1993
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This policy supersedes any other existing policy on this subject.

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Subject: **DETERMINATION OF DEATH IN THE PRE-HOSPITAL SETTING**

Authority: California Health and Safety Code, Division 2.5, Section 1797.220

Definitions: Prehospital Personnel - Shall, for the purpose of this policy refer to any of the following:

- ❖ Law enforcement officers when functioning in the capacity of first responders to a medical emergency
- ❖ Firefighters functioning in the capacity of first responders to a medical emergency
- ❖ Ambulance personnel.

Purpose: To provide criteria and guidance to prehospital personnel on determining death in the prehospital setting and procedures to be followed whenever CPR is not initiated or is discontinued in the prehospital setting in Merced County.

Policy:

1. **OBVIOUS DEATH:**

- A. Prehospital personnel shall not initiate/continue CPR on any patient, who is pulseless, non-breathing, mentally unresponsive and has one or more of the following:
1. decapitation
 2. incineration of the torso or head
 3. decomposition of body tissue
 4. exposure, destruction and/or separation of vital internal organs (e.g. brain, spinal cord, liver, heart or lungs) from the body
 5. postmortem lividity and/or rigor mortis
- B. The prehospital personnel shall make a Declaration of Death and note the time of the same on the PreHospital Care Report Form (PCR) or alternate report form. The original copy of the completed PCR shall remain with the deceased, and the remaining copies shall be for normal distribution.

APPROVED:

ON-FILE

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- C. The disturbance at the scene shall be minimized, and EMS personnel shall coordinate with the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction concerning scene integrity.
- D. If not already on scene, the prehospital personnel shall notify the County Coroner and/or the appropriate law enforcement agency that there is an OBVIOUS DEATH and shall remain at the scene until released by the coroner or law enforcement agency.
- E. If EMT-1/P Personnel are directed by a law enforcement officer to transport a patient who is an OBVIOUS DEATH, they should comply with that order AFTER informing the law enforcement officer that such transport is inappropriate and that transport is against local EMS Agency policy, that it will be noted on the PCR and an Incident Report will be filed. Contact the Merced County Base Hospital and authorized EMS Dispatch Center to report the mandated transport and proceed to the designated morgue facility.
- F. If the return route for a unit provides close proximity to a designated morgue facility or suitable transfer point and the unit can be placed temporarily out of service without jeopardizing emergency response capability, the EMS Dispatch Center, upon request of the EMT-1/P Personnel, may authorize transport of a patient who has been declared dead.

2. PROBABLE DEATH

- A. For patients who do not meet the criteria of OBVIOUS DEATH, EMT-1/P Personnel shall initiate and continue CPR and Advanced Life Support (ALS) treatment protocols until one of the following occurs:
 - 1. spontaneous effective circulation and ventilation have been restored
 - 2. the resuscitative effort has been transferred to another responsible and properly trained individual who continues it
 - 3. the rescuer is physically exhausted and unable to continue
 - 4. the EMT-1/P Personnel have reported the following to the Merced County Base Hospital Physician who has concluded that the cardiovascular system of the patient has been unresponsive to treatment and will remain so despite further resuscitative efforts, and has authorized CPR to be discontinued.
 - a. the length of time in which there has been an absence of spontaneous respiration and pulses which can be confirmed at two sites
 - b. asystole as confirmed by EKG monitor and auscultation of the chest following at least ten minutes of ALS resuscitation.
 - c. assessment of pupillary response to light
 - d. skin conditions and temperature relative to the environment

- B. When a probable death occurs as the result of a possible homicide or suicide, the following actions may be requested by law enforcement to preserve scene evidence, as they deem necessary:
1. A path into and out of the scene may be identified, and prehospital personnel shall limit their traffic to this pathway.
 2. If resuscitation is deemed appropriate, personnel may be requested to extricate the patient to a location outside of the possible crime scene. If so requested, the patient should be removed from the scene via the identified pathway.
 3. Additionally, personnel are reminded not to touch objects around the patient. If something must be moved, either request law enforcement assistance, or, if that is not practical, be prepared to identify the original location of the object to the law enforcement incident investigator.
- C. When the Merced County Base Hospital Physician authorizes discontinuation of CPR on the patient, the EMT-1/P shall make a Declaration of Death, and shall document such declaration and time on the PCR and return it to the Base Hospital.
- D. The EMT-1/P Personnel shall notify the County Coroner and/or the appropriate law enforcement agency that a Declaration of Death has occurred and shall remain at the scene until released by the Coroner or law enforcement agency.
- E. If EMT-1/P Personnel are directed by a law enforcement officer to transport a patient who has been declared dead, they shall comply with that order AFTER informing the law enforcement officer that such transport is inappropriate, that transport is against local EMS Agency Policy, that it will be noted on the PCR and an Incident Report will be filed. Contact the Merced County Base Hospital to report the mandated transport and proceed to the designated morgue facility.
- F. If the return route for a unit provides close proximity to a designated morgue facility or suitable transfer point and the unit can be placed temporarily out of service without jeopardizing emergency response capability, the EMS Dispatch Center, upon request of the EMT-1/P Personnel, may authorize transport of a patient who has been declared dead.
- G. In no case will CPR or ALS treatment Protocols be discontinued, as allowed by 2.A.(4)(a) above, nor shall a Declaration of Death be made for patients under the following criteria:
1. Any hypothermia situation (water submersion or cold exposure) except when there is an Obvious Death as defined by this policy.
 2. Whenever there are any questions or doubt about the viability of a patient or a particular situation is superseded by a subsequent policy.
 3. In these cases, the patient shall be transported to the nearest appropriate health care facility, unless declared dead as provided for above.
3. Policies and Procedures relating to medical operation during declared disaster situations or multiple casualty incidents will take priority over this policy.