



# Yolo County Emergency Medical Services Agency

## Protocols

Revised Date: September 1, 2018

### DETERMINATION OF DEATH

#### Adult

#### Pediatric

#### Purpose

This policy provides criteria for Public Safety, Emergency Medical Responder (EMR), Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and Paramedic personnel to determine death in the prehospital setting.

#### Definitions

**Rigor Mortis:** The stiffening of the body after death that normally appears within the body around 2 hours after the deceased has died. The smaller muscles are affected first followed by the subsequent larger muscles throughout the body.

**Lividity or Livor Mortis:** Discoloration appearing on dependent parts of the body after death, as a result of cessation of circulation, stagnation of blood, and settling of the blood by gravity.

**Apical Pulse:** The pulse that can be heard by auscultation at the bottom left of the heart (apex).

### BLS (Public Safety, EMR, EMT)

#### Obviously Dead

CPR need not be initiated and may be discontinued for patients who meet the criteria for "Obviously Dead"

One (1) or more of the following:

- Decapitation
- Decomposition
- Incineration of the torso and/or head
- Exposure, destruction, and/or separation of the brain or heart from the body
- A valid DNR or POLST form or medallion in accordance with the YEMSA DNR Policy
- Rigor Mortis – If the determination of death is based on RIGOR MORTIS, **ALL** of the following assessments shall be completed:

1. Assessment to confirm RIGOR MORTIS:
  - Confirm muscle rigidity of the jaw by attempting to open the mouth and/or
  - Confirm muscle rigidity of 1 arm by attempting to move the extremity
2. Assessment to confirm absence of respiration:
  - Look, listen, and feel for respirations
  - Auscultation of lung sounds for a minimum of 30 seconds
3. Assessment to confirm absence of pulse:
  - Palpate the carotid pulse for a minimum of 30 seconds
4. Assessment to confirm absence of neurological response:
  - Check for pupil response with a penlight or flashlight
  - Check for a response to painful stimuli



# Yolo County Emergency Medical Services Agency

## Protocols

Revised Date: September 1, 2018

Adult	Pediatric
<b>ALS</b>	
<b>Probable Death</b>	
<p><u>CPR need not be initiated and may be discontinued for patients who meet the criteria for "Probable Death"</u></p> <p>Persons who, in addition to the absence of respirations, pulses, and neurological reflexes have 1 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lividity or 'Livor Mortis' and the monitor shows asystole in 2 leads</li><li>• The patient is a victim of cardiac arrest secondary to blunt or penetrating trauma and the monitor shows asystole in 2 leads</li><li>• The patient is a victim of cardiac arrest secondary to blunt trauma, and the monitor shows PEA at a rate ≤ 40 BPM</li></ul>	
<p>Probable death shall be confirmed with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Assessment to confirm absence of respiration:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Look, listen, and feel for respirations</li><li>• Auscultation of lung sounds for a minimum of 30 seconds</li></ul></li><li>2. Assessment to confirm absence of pulse:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Palpate the carotid pulse for a minimum of 30 seconds</li><li>• Auscultate the apical pulse for a minimum of 30 seconds</li></ul></li><li>3. Assessment to confirm absence of neurological response:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check for pupil response with a penlight</li><li>• Check for a response to painful stimuli</li></ul></li></ol> <p>Confirmation of asystole in 2 leads (6 second strips shall be attached to the ePCR)</p>	
<b>Consider</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• IF ANY DOUBT EXISTS, prehospital personnel shall initiate CPR</li><li>• If there is any objection or disagreement by family members or prehospital personnel; CPR should begin or continue and Paramedics should contact the Base Hospital Physician for further direction</li><li>• The body and scene should be disturbed as little as possible to protect potential crime scene evidence</li><li>• Hypothermia, drug and/or alcohol ingestion/overdose can mask the positive neurological reflexes which indicate life. If any possibility exists that such conditions could be a factor, resuscitation should be started immediately</li><li>• In the event of a disaster/multi-casualty incident, death may be determined in accordance with START Triage criteria</li><li>• EMS personnel shall not transport expired patients by ambulance. In the event that a patient expires during transport EMS personnel shall continue resuscitative efforts and continue to the closest receiving facility</li><li>• If a patient undergoing resuscitation is transported in a ground ambulance to rendezvous with an air ambulance and is determined dead by the flight crew, the body shall not be moved from the rendezvous location</li></ul>	



## Yolo County Emergency Medical Services Agency

### Protocols

Revised Date: September 1, 2018

Adult	Pediatric
Direction(s)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Notify the county coroner or appropriate investigative authorities</li><li>Document all relevant facts/findings, including approximate time of determination of death</li></ul>	