

**COVID-19
Funeral Homes and the Novel Coronavirus
Frequently Questions and Answers**

Funeral home staff are charged with a profoundly special task: the task of relieving anxiety, of bringing comfort to grieving families and most importantly, of being trusted with preserving the dignity and safe-keeping of those taken under your care. You promote calm and reassurance.

It is important to monitor the messaging from the health authorities as the situation can change quickly. Please check www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19, which is updated daily.

How many guests can attend a visitation or burial?

As of March 23, 2020, in keeping with the Special Measures Order to protect the health of the public, gatherings including funerals and visitations are **limited to 10 people or less**. This means that only 10 people can be in a room at one time and stand six feet apart.

How can my funeral home help slow the spread of the virus?

For those you serve, as well as you and your staff, discuss concerns and options with the families you serve.

- Inform staff that if they have underlying medical conditions to speak to their physician about their risk.
- Advise family of the deceased that those who are ill or who are part of an at-risk population (e.g., the elderly, immune-compromised, etc.) should avoid gatherings.
- Set up your space to accommodate appropriate social distancing (maintaining a distance of two metres or arm's lengths from others).
- Remind families how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as by staying home if you are sick, social distancing, washing your hands, and covering coughs and sneezes.
- Post [informational](#) flyers about healthy habits in your funeral home. These can be found on www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19.
- Keep soap dispensers filled in public (and employee) restrooms.
- Offer alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 65% alcohol to families (and employees).
- Have extra tissues on hand and a hands free waste basket for disposal
- Scale back direct contact with families (e.g., handshakes, hugs, etc.)
- Don't provide food and beverages for fellowship as part of the funeral services.
- Keep the front door open (weather permitting) or ensure a staff person is always available to open a door during visitations and services to prevent people from touching the door knob.
- Clean high touch surfaces twice daily. <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning-NL.pdf>

How can I help families and friends who cannot attend a visitation or burial?

Funeral directors can offer livestreaming as an option for these services/viewings or, alternatively, recommend the family hold a larger memorial gathering at a later date. Services can also be recorded and the video shared with whomever the family deems appropriate.

Should I do anything differently when making arrangements?

One place of risk of infection occurs in the arrangements office, due to the close proximity of people. Use a spacious area to meet with the family; have guests keep a spare chair between them; use phone, email or video as alternatives to a physical meeting; and e-signature applications, such as DocuSign, to sign paperwork.

Is a funeral home guest at risk if they go to a funeral or visitation service for someone who died of COVID-19?

There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19.

Should funeral home guest touch their loved one who has died of COVID-19?

People should consider not touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19.

What if a family has important religious practices that involve washing the body or shrouding?

In these circumstances, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible. At a minimum, people conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required (such as disposable gown, face shield or goggles and facemask).

What do I need to know about handling decedents who had COVID-19?

Funeral home workers should follow their routine infection prevention and control precautions when handling a decedent who died of COVID-19.

Can bodies of those who die of confirmed or suspected COVID-19 be safely transported and embalmed? (Source: [CDC March 23, 2020](#))

If it is necessary to transfer a body to a bag, follow standard precautions including additional personal protective equipment (PPE) if splashing of fluids is expected. Disinfecting contaminated surfaces is of utmost importance.

Embalming can be conducted. During and after embalming, follow standard precautions including the use of additional PPE if splashing is expected (e.g. disposable gown, faceshield or goggles and facemask). Wear appropriate respiratory protection if any procedures will generate aerosols or if required for chemicals used in accordance with the manufacturer's label. Wear heavy-duty gloves over nitrile disposable gloves if there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds, or other injuries that break the skin.

Can decedents with COVID-19 be buried or cremated according to the family's preferences?

Yes, however, as per your normal protocol you should check for any additional requirements that may dictate the handling and disposition of the remains of individuals who have died of certain infectious diseases.

Do I have to self-isolate if I prepare a body that has COVID-19?

No, similar to a healthcare worker, there should be no reason to self-isolate if you have followed the precautions that you have been trained to do.