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Guidance

COVID-19: guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

Updated 23 October 2020

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

On 12 October 2020, the government introduced a system of local COVID alert levels. If you live, work or volunteer in an area that is subject to local COVID alert level: high or local COVID alert level: very high regulations, additional restrictions will apply to many activities.

In general, these additional restrictions do not have significant implications for funerals. Where they do, they have been included in this guidance.

Please visit the Local COVID alert levels page (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-levels-what-you-need-to-know>) to find out what level your area is in and the additional restrictions that apply.

Changes from previous funerals guidance are:

- a limit of 30 people attending a funeral at all local COVID alert levels – anyone working is not included in this number
- a limit of 15 people attending a linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial event in a COVID-19 secure venue or public outdoor place, at all local COVID alert levels – anyone working is not included in this number
- guidance on attending a funeral for people who are self-isolating in exceptional circumstances with the appropriate protection advice to be followed
- allowing some professional musical contributions, ideally outdoors
- wearing face coverings in a funeral director's vehicle

This guidance is of a general nature and should be treated as a guide. In the event of conflict between any applicable legislation (including the health and safety legislation) and this guidance, the applicable legislation shall prevail.

This guidance applies in England.

Main principles

This advice is designed to assist members of the public who are attending or involved in organising a funeral during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is for people of any faith, or none.

This guidance has been developed to ensure that:

- bereaved people are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect
- funerals can continue to take place while minimising the risk of infection

Guidance for venue managers and those involved in professionally arranging a funeral is available through the Deceased Management Advisory Group website (<http://www.dmag2020.org/important-updated-guidance-covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>).

This guidance remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation.

Funeral ceremonies must have no more than 30 people attending, whether indoors or outdoors. This number does not include funeral staff.

The actual number of people able to attend will depend on how many people can be safely accommodated within the premises with social distancing. In some cases, this may be fewer than 30 people.

What you need to know

This guidance aims to balance the needs of the bereaved to mourn, with the need to minimise the spread of COVID-19 infection. While recognising the importance of these rituals and gatherings, the actions detailed in this guidance are important in reducing the spread of infection, particularly to clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable people who are at risk of severe illness.

The risk of COVID-19 spread increases whenever households mix. A household means those people who live together under the same roof and share facilities. Mourners who do not normally live with the family for whom the funeral is being arranged, or are not in a support bubble with them, need to be treated as a separate household(s) and should follow social distancing guidelines (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>).

For deaths that are suspected or confirmed as being due to COVID-19, household members of the deceased person may have already been exposed to COVID-19. However, you should take steps to minimise any new exposure, especially where people who are not part of the household and those at risk of severe illness may come into contact with the virus.

Families may wish to consider deferring a celebration or memorial service until further social restrictions are lifted and at a time when attendance can take place safely.

Social distancing and keeping safe

If you are attending a funeral or similar event, you should:

- stay at least 2 metres away from others outside your household or support bubble
- follow strict hand and respiratory hygiene by:
 - washing your hands regularly for 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser
 - avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth
 - when coughing or sneezing, covering your mouth and nose with a tissue and dispose of the tissue safely. In the absence of a tissue, use the crook of your elbow (not hands) to cough or sneeze into
- wearing a face covering, as required by law when attending indoor places of worship, crematoria and burial ground chapels unless exempt for health, disability or other reasons. You should also wear a face covering in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing may be difficult and where you may come into contact with people you do not normally meet. There is additional guidance on the use of face coverings

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own#:~:text=You%20should%20also%20wear%20a,settings%2C%20such%20as%20GP%20surgeries.https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>)

- avoiding singing, shouting, chanting and a raised voice because this may increase the risk of airborne transmission of the virus

If you are organising a funeral or similar event, you should:

- consider inviting close friends and family only, to reduce the risk of spreading infection
- ensure other mourners are aware if there is a clinically extremely vulnerable person attending and be respectful of the vulnerable person's need to avoid close contact at any point. This is particularly important if anyone with a legal duty to self-isolate has chosen to attend in person
- try to facilitate remote participation, for example, via live-streaming
- ensure mourners avoid playing musical instruments that are blown. Some professional, socially-distanced vocal or instrumental contributions can be included, either indoors or outdoors, but outside wherever possible. Singing should be limited to a small, set group of no more than 6 people, staying at least 2 metres apart, and should not include audience participation. There is additional guidance on the performing arts (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>). Consider using instrumental music or recordings as an alternative to live singing
- remind mourners that spoken addresses and responses during a ceremony should not be in a raised voice. Encourage the use of microphones or similar equipment to minimise natural voice volume

Who can attend a funeral?

Funeral ceremonies must have no more than 30 people attending, whether indoors or outdoors. This number does not include funeral staff.

The actual number of people able to attend will depend on how many people can be accommodated safely within the premises with social distancing. In some cases, this may be fewer than 30 people. Keeping overall numbers as low as possible will reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Limits for funeral ceremonies held as part of communal worship should be decided based on the capacity of the place of worship. This applies to those arranging a funeral in a church, for example. Separate guidance on places of worship (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>) is available. If mourners are from different households, they should still stay at 2 metres distance from each other (or 1 metre with extra steps to reduce transmission, such as wearing a face covering).

People in the same support bubble can stay overnight with each other as they count as one household. This may be more than 6 people.

People who are symptomatic should not attend

Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell), should not attend a funeral. You should immediately self-isolate, follow the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>).

home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection), and request a test online (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>), or by contacting NHS 119 via telephone if you do not have internet access.

People who are required to self-isolate

If you have been instructed by NHS Test and Trace (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>) to self-isolate because you have tested positive for COVID-19, or you are the close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should not attend a funeral.

It is a legal offence for a person who is required to self-isolate to attend a funeral under any circumstance other than the funeral of a close family member.

Even if you are a close family member of the deceased, we strongly recommend that you attend remotely if possible, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread to other mourners. However, if after careful consideration of the risk, you choose to attend in person, it is essential that you take all of the following precautions:

- advise the funeral organiser and other mourners that you are in your self-isolation period, and ensure that you do not attend at the same time as another mourner who may be clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable
- maintain a distance of at least 2 metres between yourself and others at all times
- practise strict hand and respiratory hygiene by:
 - wearing a surgical-grade Type IIR face mask or higher grade, properly fitting, to minimise any risk of viral transmission from yourself to others. If a respirator mask is used (for example N95), this should be non-valved
 - washing your hands more often than usual with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using a hand sanitiser
 - avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
 - covering your coughs or sneezes

Any mourner who comes into close contact with you during the ceremony (for example, to console or otherwise support you) may then be required to self-isolate. Other mourners need to be aware of this prior to attending.

If you are legally required to self-isolate you may only break self-isolation if attending the funeral of a close family member and otherwise must continue to self-isolate.

People with a legal duty to self-isolate are:

- anyone who is notified that they have tested positive for COVID-19. They must self-isolate (stay at home) for the period ending 10 days after they first developed symptoms, or if they did not have symptoms, 10 days after the date of the test
- anyone who is notified that another member of their household or support bubble has tested positive. They must stay at home for the period ending 14 days after that household or support bubble member's symptoms began, or if they did not have symptoms, 14 days after the date of the test

- anyone who is instructed by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate because of close recent contact with a person outside their household or support bubble who has tested positive for COVID-19. They must stay at home for the period instructed by NHS Test and Trace (which will end 14 days after the point of most recent contact with the person who has tested positive).

Guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus infection (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>) is available.

Mourners who are clinically extremely vulnerable

If you are clinically extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) you should have received a letter to inform you, or been told by your GP. You may attend a funeral, should you wish to do so, but you are advised to keep social interactions low for your personal protection.

If you choose to attend, it is important that you maintain strict social distancing and follow the latest guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>). You should practise rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene in addition to wearing a face covering.

You are advised to travel to the venue in a car by yourself, or with someone from your household or support bubble. You should avoid public transport if at all possible.

Further information is available in the guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>).

Mourners coming from outside England

If you have travelled to England within the last 14 days from any country that is not exempt from the requirement to self-isolate (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors>), you are required to self-isolate for 14 days from the day you were last in a non-exempt country. However, you can leave your place of self-isolation in limited circumstances (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk>), including on compassionate grounds. This includes attending a funeral of a household member, a close family member or a friend (if neither household member or close family member can attend the funeral).

As for all other attendees, you should practise rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene, and wear a face covering.

Travelling to and from a funeral

You should travel to the venue in a car by yourself or with people from your household or support bubble, especially if you are clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable. If this is not possible, you are advised to:

- share your transport with the same people each time

- keep to small groups of up to 6 people at any one time, or your household and support bubble, if larger
- open windows for ventilation
- travel side by side or behind other people, rather than facing them, where seating arrangements allow
- face away from each other
- consider seating arrangements to maximise distance between people in the vehicle
- ensure the car is cleaned between journeys using standard cleaning products, particularly door handles and other areas that people may touch
- wear a face covering. You are required by law to wear a face covering on public transport, in taxis and private hire vehicles unless you are exempt for health, disability or other reasons. Passengers who are not exempt are legally required to wear a face covering when travelling in a funeral director's vehicle or hearse. A face covering is also strongly recommended for drivers

Additional guidance is available on social distancing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>) and safer travel for passengers (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>).

Linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events

For any linked religious, belief-based, ceremonial or social events that may take place before or following the funeral, such as wakes, ash scattering and stone setting, the maximum limit is 15 people in a COVID-19 secure venue, where the organiser has carried out a risk assessment and taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the virus. This limit applies to areas at all COVID-19 alert levels. If the event is taking place in a private dwelling, including private gardens, attendance is limited to 6 people unless only members of one household or support bubble attend. This may be different where additional local restrictions (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-levels-what-you-need-to-know>) are in place.

Events associated with the funeral, where food or drink is served, should take place in a COVID-19 secure venue in the form of a sit-down event with table service to support social distancing.

If you have been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace you must not break your isolation to attend any linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events. This would be a legal offence and you may be fined.

You should continue to follow the social distancing and hygiene advice given for funeral attendance.

Personal care of deceased people

You are advised not to take part in rituals or practices that bring you into close contact with the deceased. If your faith requires you to have close contact with the deceased, you need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) under the supervision of someone who is trained in the appropriate use of PPE. Detailed guidance on care of the deceased (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>) should be followed, regardless of the setting in which personal care of the deceased is provided.

If you are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable you are strongly advised to avoid contact with the body of the deceased, even if you can wear PPE. This includes washing, preparing or dressing the body.

Experiencing grief or bereavement

Whenever the loss of a friend or loved one happens, it can be an extremely difficult and challenging time. This may be even more difficult if you are experiencing bereavement and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

You may struggle not just with the bereavement, but with the impact of social distancing measures and the fact that you may not be able to say goodbye in the way that you would have wanted.

After a bereavement, you may feel waves of intense emotions as you come to terms with the loss. These can include sadness, guilt, shock and anger. All are common and there is no right or wrong way to feel. Grief affects everyone in different ways, but the important thing is to grieve and to have the right support to do this.

Learn more about grief and support available through the NHS (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>), Cruse Bereavement Care (<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>), which offers advice and support on dealing with bereavement and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic and ataloss.org (<https://www.ataloss.org/>), which provides signposting and services across the UK. If you are supporting a bereaved child or young person, the Childhood Bereavement Network (<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>) has information and links to national and local organisations.

The Health Protection Regulations

This document is guidance.

The law is contained in the following Health Protection Regulations for England in 2020:

- Medium – Local COVID-19 Alert Level (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1103/contents/made>)
- High – Local COVID-19 Alert Level (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1104/contents/made>)
- Very High – COVID-19 Alert Level (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1105/contents/made>)
- Coronavirus Restrictions (No. 2) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/684/contents/made>)
- Wearing of face coverings in a relevant place (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/839/made>) (amended)
- Coronavirus Restrictions on self-isolation (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1045/made>)

For the position of what is lawful, you should refer specifically to the relevant regulations above.