

TOOL 2

Management of Funerals During COVID-19 Outbreak



BACKGROUND

There is an increased risk of transmission of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) where families and communities come together following the death of a loved one, from any cause. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in communities, families and communities are advised to take prevention measures and some changes to traditional or religious practices are recommended.

Purpose of this Guidance

This advice is designed to assist people who organize or attend a funeral related to a death from any cause during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The guidance has been developed to ensure that:

- Grieving people are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect
- Mourners and workers involved in the management of funerals are protected from avoidable risk of infection
- Proper management and burial of dead bodies at community level is conducted.



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HOW TO

Manage Funerals and Mourn Safely During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 by following these guidelines:

Funeral Attendance: Who can attend a funeral?

Only a small number (per COVID 19 gathering guidelines) of family and friends of the deceased should travel to attend a funeral. Where possible limit overnight stay at the funeral place to only immediate family and household members, ensuring social distancing is maintained.

Mourners with underlying conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and other conditions, who wish to attend can be supported to attend. Family member can reduce the vulnerable person's risk of exposure to COVID-19 through:

- Reducing contact with people outside their household or close family and friends
- Advising other attendees that there is a vulnerable close family member and reiterating the need to stay at home if they are unwell with symptoms of COVID-19, and to be respectful of the vulnerable person's need to avoid close contact at any point
- Advising the mourner to travel to the venue via the safest route possible, preferably in a car by themselves, or with someone from their household or close family and friends
- Encouraging adherence to rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene measures, including wearing of masks.

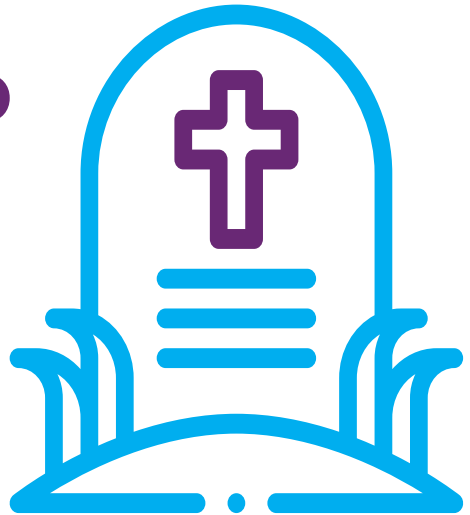
Who Should Not Attend a Funeral?

Mourners who are showing symptoms of COVID-19 (continuous cough, high temperature or a loss of, or change in their normal sense of taste or smell) should not attend the funeral due to the risk that they pose to others.

Mourners who are self-isolating due to a possible case of COVID-19 in their household should not attend if they have any symptoms of COVID-19, even if these are very mild.

Consider participation without attendance

The family is encouraged to make plans for remote participation (live streaming or phoning grieving family) for mourners who cannot physically attend the funeral for various reasons.

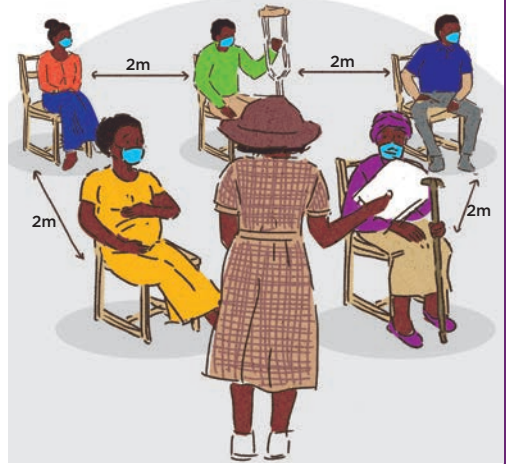




HOW TO Safely Conduct the Funeral Event

In some situations, many people have become sick with COVID-19 after attending a funeral service. Following recommended preventative measures will help protect everyone and reduce the spread of the virus:

- Remind all mourners to wear face masks
- Venue managers should ensure that handwashing facilities with soap and water or hand sanitizer are available and clearly signposted
- Consider fumigation of the venue before and after the funeral
- Ensure venue capacity and attendance numbers allow at least 2 metres (3 steps) to be maintained between individuals.



Key Considerations on Cultural Practices and Rituals

There are many different cultural traditions involved in the grieving process, including some that involve touching the deceased person's body in preparation for viewing. It may be possible that you could get COVID-19 by touching the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19. Bereaving family should discuss with the funeral service leader (e.g. religious leaders like pastors) any potential changes that might be necessary to protect all the participants and attendees.

Consider options for modified or new practices that would be acceptable to family and friends:

- Practices such as singing, chanting, requiring raised voices or playing of instruments that are blown into should be specifically avoided. This is because these activities pose a possible additional risk of infection even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used
- Holding a graveside-only service
- During body viewing mourners should keep 1 metre viewing distance, wear masks, avoid touching or kissing the body and avoid hugging one another
- Limiting sharing of items, such as worship aids, prayer books, and other items shared or passed by clergy and attendees during religious rituals
- Avoiding having non-household members sharing vehicles to travel between locations during the services.



General Prevention Messages for Mourners



Stay at least 2 metres (3 steps) away from other mourners



Wash your hands frequently, for 20 seconds using soap and water or hand sanitizer, particularly after coughing, sneezing and blowing one's nose, or after being in public areas



Cough or sneeze into your elbow (not hands)



Wear masks throughout the time you are at the funeral event



Avoid physical interactions, including shaking hands and hugging.



What to do when you get sick?

If you start having symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, shortness of breath, or fever equal to or greater than 38°C, or signs of fever e.g. shivering, flushed skin, excessive sweating) :

- Isolate yourself from others
- Immediately call “2019 or 393” and describe your symptoms and travel history and follow their instructions.



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