



## COVID-19 Guidance for Funeral Homes

### Preventative Actions for Funeral Homes Directors

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, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A funeral or visitation service can be held for a person who has died of COVID-19 with certain limitations. Persons who have COVID-19 or are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should be restricted from attending the funeral service or visitation to prevent its spread to others. Attempt to provide ways for family members or close friends to join the service remotely through use of available technology or offer to record the funeral service for later viewing.

Consistent with recommendations from the [National Funeral Directors Association \(NFDA\)](#), funeral home directors should follow CDC guidelines on gatherings, including those directly related to funerals, visitations, or graveside services. Funerals are limited to no more than 10 of the decedent's immediate family members; this does not include funeral home staff, the clergy/celebrant or cemetery staff. Services should be held at the gravesite whenever possible; however, the nature of the disposition, such a cremation, may mean a service in the funeral home is more appropriate. Decedents with COVID-19 can be buried or cremated but check for any additional state or local requirements that may dictate the handling and disposition of the remains of individuals who have died of certain infectious diseases.

### Preventative Actions for General Public Attending a Funeral Service or Visitation

COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning how it spreads. The following basic precautions should be followed by everyone in the general public:

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Following social distancing recommendations and proper handwashing will help prevent the spread of the disease. The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person in close contact (i.e.,

within 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory disease spread. . It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. Older people and people of all ages with severe underlying health conditions are at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness.

People should consider not touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19. There may be less of a chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging after the body has been prepared for viewing. Other activities, such as kissing, washing, and shrouding should be avoided before, during, and after the body has been prepared, if possible. If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, 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 higher risk 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).

## **Preventative Actions for Funeral Home Workers Handling Decedents**

Funeral home workers may potentially be exposed to the COVID-19 virus if they are entering homes or other locations where persons with COVID-19 are present, and they may not know if a person has died from COVID-19 or if other persons at the same location have COVID-19.

Unless the funeral home worker knows that they will not be exposed to COVID-19 when they are going to a location to handle a decedent, it is recommended that they follow standard precautions, and use PPE recommended for emergency medical service (EMS) personnel.

Funeral home workers should follow routine infection prevention and control precautions when handling a decedent who died of COVID-19. If it is necessary to transfer a body to a bag, follow standard precautions, including additional PPE if splashing of fluids is expected. For transporting a body after the body has been bagged, disinfect the outside of the bag with a product on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time). Wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling a body bag. Body bags and removal pouches should be properly disposed after they are used unless manufacturer's instructions allow for reuse after proper cleaning and disinfection.

Embalming can be conducted. During embalming, follow standard precautions including the use of additional PPE if splashing is expected (e.g., disposable gown, face shield 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. Additional information on how to safely conduct aerosol-generating procedures is in the CDC's Postmortem Guidance.

Cleaning should be conducted in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Use EPA- approved disinfectants on the List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2, or with a human coronavirus claim. Follow the

manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time).

After cleaning and removal of PPE, perform hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water is not available. Soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled.