

# GUIDANCE FOR FUNERAL HOMES

## Overview

Under current Chief Medical Officer of Health Orders, businesses and entities are required to:

- implement practices to minimize the risk of transmission of infection among attendees;
- provide procedures for rapid response if an attendee develops symptoms of illness;
- ensure that attendees maintain high levels of sanitation and personal hygiene; and
- comply, to the extent possible, with the [COVID-19 General Relaunch Guidance](#), this guidance, and any other applicable Alberta Health guidance found at: <https://www.alberta.ca/biz-connect.aspx>.

This document has been developed to support funeral home directors in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 among attendees (including workers, volunteers, attendees and the general public). The guidance provided outlines public health and infection prevention and control measures, specific to hosting funerals and bereavement events.

In Stage 2, with 2 metres of distance maintained between members of different households (with the exception of [cohort families](#)), seated events such as funeral **ceremonies** are **limited to a maximum of 100 invitees**.

- **Indoor social gatherings associated with funerals are limited to a maximum of 50 people** (e.g., wedding or funeral receptions).
- **Outdoor social gatherings associated with funerals are limited to a maximum of 100 people.**

This document and the guidance within it is subject to change and will be updated as needed. Current information related to COVID-19 can be found at <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-information.aspx>.

## COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

<b>General Guidance</b>	The following are considerations ensure that attendance restrictions for funerals and associated social gatherings can be met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Host multiple, smaller events for the deceased individual in lieu of a single, large event. Implement protocols for thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting event spaces between each event.</li><li>• Establish an online system for attendees to reserve a specific time.</li><li>• Offer options for remote participation (e.g. telephone, video conference, video recordings) in conjunction with or as a replacement for in-person funerals and bereavement events, or to enable more participation.</li><li>• Providing other options for people who are at greater risk of severe disease, including people over 65 years of age and people with chronic medical conditions.</li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ For those at higher risk who choose to attend in person, consider extra precautions, such as designating times for their attendance and strongly encouraging the use of face masks by all attendees.</li></ul> <p>Other options to protect public health include offering “drive-by,” “drive through” or “drive in” funeral services in which individuals attend the funeral or bereavement event and pay respects without leaving their cars.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Vehicles should contain only individuals from the same household or <a href="#">cohort family</a>.</li><li>● Discourage people from leaving their vehicles during the funeral or bereavement event, except when using the washroom.</li><li>● Discourage vehicle idling.</li><li>● Religious leaders, staff, and volunteers who approach a vehicle to provide services to its occupants are encouraged to wear a mask if car windows are rolled down and if they are not able to maintain a 2-metre distance from the occupants.</li><li>● Vehicle occupants should not pass items between vehicles.</li></ul> <p>To support public health contact tracing efforts in the event that an attendee tests positive, organizers should consider collecting the names and contact information of attendees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Providing information is voluntary for attendees. An organization must obtain an individual’s consent and notify them about the purpose and legal authority for the collection.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Any personal information that is collected for COVID-19 contact tracing can only be used for this purpose</li></ul></li><li>● Information about attendees will only be requested by Alberta Health Services if a potential exposure occurs onsite.</li><li>● For businesses/workplaces, this includes staff, workers and volunteers on shift.</li><li>● Records should only be kept for 2 weeks. An organization must make reasonable security arrangements to protect the personal information.</li><li>● For more information, the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has released <a href="#">Pandemic FAQ: Customer Lists</a> about collecting personal information from customers during the COVID-19 pandemic.</li><li>● For questions about your obligations under PIPA, please contact the FOIP-PIPA Help Desk by phone at 780-427-5848 or by email at <a href="mailto:sa.accessandprivacy@gov.ab.ca">sa.accessandprivacy@gov.ab.ca</a>.</li></ul>
<b>Facilities</b>	The Funeral Home Director should consider making adjustments to the funeral home to support physical distancing among staff, volunteers, and attendees of funeral events. This could include:

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlling and staggering entry into, and exit from, the funeral home during funeral and bereavement events (e.g. by dismissing individuals by household or section, rather than all at once).</li> <li>• Establishing different points of entry and exit from high traffic areas.</li> <li>• Arranging or marking seating to ensure physical distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household or cohort family.</li> <li>• Identifying areas, such as lobbies, where crowding and bottlenecks are common, and using volunteers, staff, or barriers to redirect people who may gather in these areas.</li> <li>• Using floor markings to encourage physical distancing if attendees are required to wait in line (e.g. to pay respects).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Singing, Live Music and Performances</b></p>	<p>COVID-19 can be transmitted through saliva or respiratory droplets while singing, or when performing live music, drama or dance in close proximity. As such, these activities should be considered to be higher-risk and either postponed or carefully managed with appropriate physical distancing and the wearing of masks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congregational singing is discouraged. Consider a soloist or instrumental music instead. Where appropriate, attendees can be encouraged to hum along to instrumental, remote, or recorded performances.</li> <li>• Hand-held microphones should not be shared. This includes between emcees and those proposing toasts or giving speeches. Podium or stand microphones can be shared, but should not be touched by speakers.</li> <li>• Performances that include singing –soloists or in small groups –should take the following precautions:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Keep singers completely separate from the audience and each other by livestreaming individuals singing separately.</li> <li>○ Limit the number of people singing in the same place to the fewest possible.</li> <li>○ Have people sing facing away from others or otherwise creating separation using an acrylic barrier such as Plexiglas.</li> <li>○ Use pre-prepared audio or video recordings.</li> <li>○ Where appropriate, attendees can be encouraged to hum along to instrumental, remote, or recorded performances.</li> <li>○ Have singers wear face masks while singing.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Interpersonal Interactions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although it is natural to want to grieve together and comfort each other, hugging, touching, or passing items between attendees (e.g. tissues, gifts, or the deceased’s belongings) must be avoided, unless it is between members of the same household or cohort family.</li> <li>• Religious or spiritual rituals that involve physical contact between individuals should be postponed or performed in a way that does not involve physical contact.</li> <li>• Inform individuals who attend in person that mask wearing is an option for them to further reduce the risk of transmission. However, even when</li> </ul>

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	<p>wearing masks, attendees should always try to maintain a 2-metre distance from anyone who is not a member of their household or cohort family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees and staff should follow proper respiratory etiquette practices at all times. These practices include coughing and sneezing into the elbow or a tissue, discarding tissues into a lined garbage bin, and washing hands afterwards.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Touching the Deceased</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Touching of the deceased or their clothing is discouraged; however, if the family determines that this is an essential part of the funeral or bereavement event, it will be permitted as long as:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hand sanitizer or soap and running, potable water is provided; and,</li> <li>Attendees are instructed to wash or sanitize their hands thoroughly after touching the deceased, their clothing, or the coffin.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Kissing or embracing the deceased or the coffin is not recommended.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Touching Shared Items</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If required for personal, cultural, spiritual, or other reasons, touching of ceremonial objects (e.g. statues, religious symbols, rings) may occur if hand hygiene is practiced before and after touching the object.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals should be discouraged from kissing, embracing, or pressing their faces on any shared ceremonial object.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Attendees bringing gifts, cards, money, or other items for the deceased or the family should not hand them directly to the family or any other individual as this could prevent social distancing. Alternatives include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A designated area for attendees to place items and donations. Touching of items and donations from attendees should be minimized for the first 24 hours. If they must be handled for the purpose of transport or storage, the individual who touches them should practice proper hand hygiene before and after doing so.</li> <li>Online donations.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Food</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funeral home operators that provide food services are required to follow the <a href="#">Food Regulation</a> and <a href="#">Food Retail and Foodservices Code</a> and existing occupational health and safety requirements.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operators should also follow the <a href="#">COVID-19 General Relaunch Guidance</a> and the <a href="#">Guidance for Restaurants, Cafe's, Pubs and Bars</a>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Buffets and self service options may only be offered if facilitated and overseen by a commercial caterer who holds a food handling permit in accordance with the <a href="#">Guidance for Restaurant, Cafés, Pubs and Bars</a>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pall-bearing and Burial Procedures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where possible, the practice of pallbearing should be avoided.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If pallbearing is required or specifically requested by the family or community, pallbearers must be protected from respiratory and contact transmission hazards.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Where the funeral services director is unable to provide masks for pallbearers, they may ask pallbearers to provide their own.</li><li>○ Ensure physical distancing is maintained where possible, minimize the distance traveled to avoid exertion and heavy breathing, and wash or sanitize hands immediately after handling surfaces.</li><li>● People 65 years of age or older and individuals with chronic medical conditions should not act as pallbearers, as it is difficult to maintain physical distancing of 2 metres from other pallbearers during this activity.</li><li>● Individuals should perform hand hygiene before and after handling the body or casket.</li></ul>
<b>Preparing the Deceased</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● People who have died from COVID-19 may be buried or cremated.</li><li>● Handling of the body by non-licensed persons such as religious or cultural groups, family or friends should be minimized, especially in cases where the deceased person is a known or suspected case of COVID-19.</li><li>● For more information on best practices for funeral homes and other professionals that will be handling and preparing the body, review Alberta Health Service’s <a href="#">COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Handling of Deceased Persons</a>.</li></ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <a href="#">COVID-19 Information for Albertans</a></li><li>● <a href="#">Reducing transmission in gatherings</a></li></ul>