**COVID-19 INFORMATION**

**GUIDANCE FOR FUNERAL HOMES**

---

### Overview

With appropriate controls in place, funeral home directors and staff may be allowed to resume hosting funerals and bereavement events with attendance limited at each event to **no more than 50 people** or **one third of the normal seating capacity**, whichever is smaller.

All funeral homes should follow the public health guidance below and review their operating and event procedures to keep everyone, especially the most vulnerable, safe. Funeral homes must also follow the [Workplace Guidance for Business Owners](#).

The Funeral Home Director or Operator is responsible for taking steps to prevent the risk of transmission of infection among any workers, volunteers and patrons who enter their funeral home for a funeral or bereavement event. Any activity or practice that increases the risk of COVID-19 through contact (e.g. touching surfaces) or droplet transmission (e.g. sneezing, coughing, singing, shouting) should be discontinued or altered to prevent the risk of spreading COVID-19 among attendees, staff, and volunteers.

### COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protecting Funeral Attendees</th>
<th>Attendance restrictions can be facilitated by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Hosting multiple, smaller events for a deceased individual in lieu of a single, large event, with protocols for thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting event spaces between each event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establishing an online system for attendees to reserve a specific time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offering 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Providing other options besides in-person attendance for people who are at greater risk of severe disease, including people over 65 years of age and people with chronic medical conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o For those at higher risk who choose to attend in person, the funeral home director or operator should ensure extra precautions are taken for these attendees, such as designating times for their attendance and encouraging masks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

- Vehicles should contain only individuals from the same household or cohort family.
- Discourage people from leaving their vehicles during the funeral or bereavement event, except when using the washroom.
- Discourage vehicle idling.
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 two-metre distance from the occupants.

Vehicle occupants should not pass items between vehicles.

**Facility**

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:

- 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).
- Establishing different points of entry and exit from high traffic areas.
- Arranging or marking seating to ensure social distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household or cohort family.
- 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.
- Using floor markings to encourage physical distancing if attendees are required to wait in line (e.g. to pay respects).

**Singing, Live Music and Performances**

Infected people can transmit the virus through their saliva or respiratory droplets while singing, or when performing live music, drama or dance in close proximity of one another. As such, these activities should be considered to be higher-risk and either postponed or carefully managed at funeral events.

- Singing by attendees is discouraged. Consider soloist music as an alternative to musical groups or bands.
- Funerals that include singing – soloists or in small groups – should take the following precautions:
  - Keep singers completely separate from the audience and each other by livestreaming individuals singing separately
  - Limit the number of people singing in the same place to the fewest possible
  - Have people sing facing away from others or otherwise creating separation using an acrylic barrier such as Plexiglas.
- If group singing, music, or performances are required for personal, cultural, or spiritual reasons, the funeral home can also:
  - Use pre-prepared audio or video recordings.
  - Live stream individuals from safe, separate locations singing or performing.
- Where appropriate, attendees can be encouraged to hum along to instrumental, remote, or recorded performances.
## Interpersonal Interactions
- 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.
- Religious or spiritual rituals that involve physical contact between individuals should be avoided or performed in a way that does not involve physical contact.
- Individuals who attend in person can wear clean, properly fitted masks to further reduce the risk of transmission. However, even when wearing masks, attendees should always try to maintain a two-metre distance from anyone who is not a member of their household or cohort family.
- 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.

## Touching the Deceased
- 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:
  - Hand sanitizer or soap and running, potable water is provided; and,
  - Attendees are instructed to wash or sanitize their hands thoroughly after touching the deceased, their clothing, or the coffin.
- Kissing or embracing the deceased or the coffin is not recommended.

## Touching Shared Items
- 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.
  - Individuals must not kiss, embrace, or press their faces on any shared ceremonial object.
- 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:
  - 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.
  - Online donations.
### COVID-19 INFORMATION
### GUIDANCE FOR FUNERAL HOMES

| **Food** | • At this time, the provision of food and beverages during funerals or bereavement events is strongly discouraged because of the increased risk of spreading COVID-19.  
• If the family or community wishes to pursue a food service before or after the funeral, they should be encouraged to go to a permitted food service establishment where measures have been implemented in line with the latest public health measures to ensure the safe preparation and serving of food.  
• If the funeral home is a permitted food establishment, food must be served to guests by staff. There can be no self-serve food or buffet-style food service.  
• Seating capacity in dining areas must be reduced by a minimum of 50%, in accordance with the [Guidance for Restaurants, Cafes, Pubs and Bars](#).

| **Pall-bearing and Burial Procedures** | • Where possible, the practice of pallbearing should be avoided.  
  o If pallbearing is required or specifically requested by the family or community, pallbearers must be protected from respiratory and contact transmission hazards.  
  o Where the funeral services director is unable to provide masks for pallbearers, they may ask pallbearers to provide their own.  
  o 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.  
• 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 two metres from other pallbearers during this activity.  
• Individuals should perform hand hygiene before and after handling the body or casket.

| **Preparing the Deceased** | • People who have died from COVID-19 may be buried or cremated.  
• 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.  
• 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 [COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Handling of Deceased Persons](#).

| **Resources** | • [COVID-19 Information for Albertans](#)  
• [Workplace Guidance for Business owners](#)  
• [Reducing transmission in gatherings](#) |