

New advice for safe funerals after discussions with faith leaders

Faith leaders have been consulted and worked with PHE to ensure that communities, the funeral industry and the NHS are protected.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease and can be transmitted when large groups of people congregate. However, with certain precautions funerals should continue to take place.

To help reduce the risk of spreading the infection, funeral directors and faith leaders are advised to restrict the number of mourners who attend funerals, so a safe distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) can be maintained between individuals. Only members of the deceased person's household or close family members should attend funerals. Any individual displaying symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend. Those who do attend will need to adhere to social distancing at all times, including when travelling to and from the funeral.

In addition, the guidance advises that since there is a small but real risk of transmission from the body of a deceased person, mourners are strongly advised not to take part in any rituals or practices that bring them into close contact with the body of a person who has died from or with symptoms of COVID-19. Practices that involve close personal contact with the deceased should only be carried out using the correct personal protective equipment (PPE).

Professor Paul Cosford CB, Emeritus Medical Director, Public Health England, said:

Losing a loved one is a sad and distressing experience and funerals are important and personal. During this very difficult time for the country, our aim is to protect the most vulnerable from the spread of coronavirus.

We are encouraging all mourners to practise social distancing at funerals for the time being. This sadly means limiting the number of mourners to immediate households and closest family members.

Professor Jim McManus, Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire, said:

It is natural to wish to be with people we love and have lost in death. It may be felt as an additional cruelty that such physical closeness, while providing solace for our loss, may spread the virus still further. Only skilled and sensitive local care can help console people through such compound pain and loss.

Mohamed Omer, board member of Gardens of Peace, said:

We welcome the new guidance from PHE and would like to reiterate that it is essential that we maintain social distancing at all times, including at funerals. We should also severely curtail the numbers who attend the funerals so as to ensure that staff working at burial sites and others are protected. If circumstances dictate then we should contemplate, as hard as it may seem, no attendees at funeral time.

It is also welcoming to note that we can perform our ritual wash as long as we observe the necessary precautions of wearing the right PPE and follow the process included in this guideline. It is hoped that there will be uniformity now in the whole system so that there is no confusion and conflicting reports on the risk of handling a COVID-19 deceased person.

Marie van der Zyl, President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, said:

It is a central issue for the Jewish community that we honour and respect our departed loved ones while protecting the living. Our community introduced new strictures on handling the deceased in order to do this immediately after the start of the COVID-19 outbreak.

This thorough and considerate guidance from government supports the Jewish community's safeguarding actions to date, and we are grateful to the government for their continued efforts to preserve lives and community life.

The guidance also assists professionals such as coroners, pathologists, funeral directors and others in their work. There is also guidance for GPs managing a death outside of a healthcare setting and for those in the community or in residential care settings.

This [guidance](#) brings together previously published information.

By following these precautions funeral workers and mourners can safely respect and maintain the dignity of the deceased. Unless it is for a specific reason, at this moment of national emergency, it is vital that we all stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.

If the deceased has neither household or family members in attendance, then it is possible for a modest number of friends to attend.