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Guidance

# COVID-19: guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

Updated 22 January 2021

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

On 4 January the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>) for all of England. There is different advice for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

These restrictions:

- require people to stay at home, except for where you have a reasonable excuse
- prevent people gathering with those they do not live with, except for specific purposes
- close certain businesses and venues

From 6 January, during the national lockdown people are permitted to leave their homes to attend a funeral as well as other religious, belief-based, or commemorative events that are linked to a person's death, as long as they follow the relevant rules and guidance.

During the national lockdown, funerals can be attended by a maximum of 30 people.

Religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death, such as stone setting ceremonies, the scattering of ashes or a wake, can also continue with up to 6 people in attendance. In this guidance, the phrase 'commemorative events' will be used to refer to such events.

This guidance is of a general nature and should be treated as a guide. In the event of conflict between any applicable legislation (including the health and safety legislation) and this guidance, the applicable legislation shall prevail.

This guidance applies in England. It remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation.

## Main principles

This advice is designed to assist members of the public who are attending or involved in organising a funeral in England during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is for people of any faith, or none.

This guidance has been developed to ensure that:

- bereaved people are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect
- funerals can continue to take place while minimising the risk of infection

Guidance for venue managers and those involved in professionally arranging a funeral is available through the website for the Advisory Group on the Management of the Deceased (<http://www.dmag2020.org/important-updated-guidance-covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-2/>).

## Guidance during the national lockdown

Across England, we are asking everyone to stay at home. You are permitted to leave your home to attend a funeral or commemorative event but you should try and keep any arrangements local wherever possible.

Funeral ceremonies must have no more than 30 people attending, whether indoors or outdoors. This number does not include anyone working at the event. The actual number of people able to attend will depend on how many people can be safely accommodated within the venue with social distancing, and where the funeral venue manager has carried out a risk assessment and taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19. In some cases, this may be fewer than 30 people.

During the national lockdown, no more than 6 people can attend commemorative events such as stone setting ceremonies, the scattering of ashes or a wake. This limit applies both indoors and outdoors and does not include anyone working at the event.

Crematoriums and burial grounds will be open to the public and you are permitted to leave your home to visit these locations. You should always stay socially distanced from anyone outside your household or support bubble and should follow guidance on meeting with others safely (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>).

## What you need to know

This guidance aims to balance the needs of the bereaved to mourn, with the need to minimise the spread of COVID-19 infection. While recognising the importance of these rituals and gatherings, the actions detailed in this guidance are important in reducing the spread of infection, particularly to clinically vulnerable (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>) and clinically extremely vulnerable people (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) who may be at risk of severe illness.

The risk of COVID-19 spread increases whenever households mix. A household is defined as those people who live together under the same roof and who share facilities. Any mourners who are not part of the same household or support bubble (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household>) should follow social distancing guidelines (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>).

For deaths where COVID-19 infection was present, household members of the deceased person may have already been exposed to COVID-19. However, you should take steps to minimise any new exposure, especially where people who are not part of the household, and those at risk of severe illness, may come into contact with the virus.

## Social distancing and keeping safe

If you are attending a funeral or similar event, you should:

- stay at least 2 metres away from others outside your household or support bubble
- wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- when coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue and throw away the tissue safely. If you do not have a tissue, use the crook of your elbow (not hands) to cough or sneeze into
- wear a face covering, as required by law when attending indoor places of worship, crematoria and burial ground chapels unless you are exempt for health, disability or other reasons. You should also wear a face covering in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing may be difficult and where you may come into contact with people you do not normally meet. There is additional guidance on the use of face coverings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>)

- avoid singing, shouting, chanting and raising your voice because this may increase the risk of airborne transmission of the virus

If you are organising a funeral or commemorative event, you should:

- consider inviting close friends and family only, to reduce the risk of spreading infection
- ensure other mourners are aware if there is a clinically vulnerable, or clinically extremely vulnerable person attending. They should be respectful of the vulnerable person's need to avoid close contact at any point
- try to facilitate remote participation (for example, by live-streaming), particularly for anyone who is clinically extremely vulnerable and may be shielding
- ensure mourners avoid playing musical instruments that are blown. Some professional, socially-distanced vocal or instrumental contributions can take place, either indoors or outdoors, but outside wherever possible. Singing should be limited one person where possible (up to 3 individuals if it is essential to an act of worship), staying at least 2 metres apart, and should not include audience participation. There is additional guidance on the performing arts (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>). Consider using instrumental music or recordings as an alternative to live singing
- remind mourners that spoken addresses and responses during a ceremony should not be in a raised voice. Encourage the use of microphones or similar equipment to minimise the need to raise voices

## Who can attend a funeral?

Funeral ceremonies must have no more than 30 people attending, whether indoors or outdoors. This number does not include anyone working at the event.

The actual number of people able to attend will depend on how many people can be accommodated safely within the premises with social distancing, and where the organiser has carried out a risk assessment and taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19. In some cases, this may be fewer than 30 people. Keeping overall numbers as low as possible will reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Limits for funeral ceremonies held as part of communal worship that follows COVID-19 secure guidelines will be defined by the capacity of the place of worship. Guidance on places of worship (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>) is available.

## People with symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend

Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell), should not attend a funeral. You should immediately self-isolate, follow the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>), and request a test online (<https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>), or by contacting NHS 119 via telephone if you do not have internet access.

## People who are required to self-isolate

You must self-isolate if you have tested positive for COVID-19, you are the close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or you have been advised to do so by NHS Test & Trace and should not attend a funeral due to the risk you pose to others. By following instructions to self-isolate, people who have had close recent contact with someone with COVID-19 will be protecting their family, friends, colleagues and other people around them, and will play a direct role in stopping the spread of the virus. Follow the guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus infection (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>).

If you are legally required to self-isolate, you may only break self-isolation if attending the funeral of a close family member (for example, a partner, parent, sibling or grandparent). You must not break your isolation to attend other commemorative events under any circumstance. This would be a legal offence and you may be fined. You must otherwise continue to self-isolate unless there are other circumstances present that legally allow you not to.

Even if you are a close family member of the deceased, we strongly recommend that you attend remotely if possible. However, if after careful consideration of the risk, you choose to attend a funeral in person, it is essential that you take all of the following precautions:

- advise the funeral venue manager and other mourners in advance that you are in your self-isolation period. It is a legal requirement for a venue manager to complete a risk assessment and take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Other mourners need to be aware of this prior to attending
- take extra care to keep your distance and avoid contact with another mourner who may be clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable
- maintain a distance of at least 2 metres at all times between yourself and other mourners

Practise strict hand and respiratory hygiene by:

- wearing a surgical-grade Type IIR face mask or higher grade, properly fitting, to minimise any risk of viral transmission from yourself to others. If a respirator mask is used (for example N95), this should be non-valved. Type IIR masks are widely available from pharmacies, supermarkets and online retailers. We advise you to provide your own face mask, but those organising the funeral may also want to ensure they have some in stock
- washing your hands more often than usual with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using a hand sanitiser
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- covering your coughs or sneezes

## **Mourners who are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable**

If you are clinically vulnerable (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>), or clinically extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) you will have received a letter (a formal NHS notification) to inform you of this and you may have been advised to shield in the past.

You are strongly advised to stay at home as much as possible and participate remotely where this is possible. If you do choose to attend a funeral in person, you should inform those organising the funeral and it is important that you maintain strict social distancing and follow the guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable->

persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19). You should practise rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene in addition to wearing a face covering, and should keep social interactions low.

You are advised to travel to the venue in a car by yourself, or with someone from your household or support bubble (if you are eligible to form one). You should avoid public transport.

## Mourners coming from outside England

If you have travelled to England from any country that is not exempt from the requirement to self-isolate (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors>), you are required to self-isolate from arrival and for the first full 10 days after you arrive. However, you can leave your place of self-isolation in limited circumstances (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk#how-to-self-isolate-in-your-accommodation>), including on compassionate grounds. This includes attending a funeral of a household member, a close family member or a friend (if neither household member or close family member can attend the funeral).

You must continue to self-isolate at all other times.

If you are arriving from a country that is not exempt from the requirement to self-isolate, you may be able to leave self-isolation at an earlier stage if you have participated in the Test to Release for International Travel Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-test-to-release-for-international-travel>).

## Travelling to and from a funeral

People in the same support bubble can stay overnight with each other as they count as one household. Hotels may also remain open for the purposes of providing accommodation for anyone attending a funeral or commemorative event. Anyone who does not live in the same household or support bubble should remain socially distanced within the accommodation.

You should travel to the venue in private transport by yourself or with people from your household or support bubble. If this is not possible, you must not car share with those outside your household or support bubble. You are advised to follow the safer travel guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>) by:

- keeping to a small group of your household or support bubble if you need to use public transport
- opening windows for fresh air
- considering seating arrangements to maximise the distance between people in the vehicle
- travelling side-by-side or behind other people, rather than facing them, where seating arrangements allow
- facing away from each other
- making sure the car is cleaned between journeys using standard cleaning products, particularly door handles and other areas that people may touch
- wearing a face covering. You are required by law to wear a face covering on public transport, in taxis and private hire vehicles unless you are exempt for health, disability or other reasons. Passengers who are not exempt are legally required to wear a face covering when travelling in a funeral director's vehicle. A face covering is also strongly recommended for drivers

## Linked religious, belief-based or commemorative events

In this guidance, the phrase 'commemorative events' is used to refer to religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death, other than a funeral. Stone setting ceremonies, the scattering of ashes and wakes are examples of such events. These may take place before or following the funeral. During the national lockdown, these events can continue with up to 6 people attending. This number applies both indoors and outdoors and does not include anyone working at the event.

All events should take place in a COVID-secure venue, where the venue manager has carried out a risk assessment and taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19. If the event is taking place in a private dwelling, including its grounds or gardens, only members of the household or support bubble can attend.

If you have been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace you must not break your isolation to attend any commemorative events. This would be a legal offence and you may be fined.

You may wish to consider delaying commemorative events until restrictions have been lifted.

## **Where you can hold commemorative events**

During the national lockdown, hospitality venues are not permitted to open to hold commemorative events. Venues like community centres, places of worship, burial grounds, cemeteries and crematoriums can remain open to hold these events. Areas of exhibition centres, and conference centres that are not bars and restaurants (for example, conference halls or meeting rooms) may also be rented for this purpose. Only light refreshments should be served at linked events within these venues (and cannot be provided by the venue itself).

## **Food and drink at commemorative events**

At the event, you should remain seated, socially distanced from those outside your household or support bubble, with table service provided to support social distancing and to minimise any risk of infection. You should not touch communal or shared objects, or handle items other than your own (for example, avoid the use of shared cutlery, dishes or service sheets). Sharing food should be avoided and other actions to reduce the risk of transmission should also be considered, for example, use of pre-wrapped food where not provided by the venue. You should ensure that social distancing measures are observed at all times and guidance on the use of face coverings is also followed.

## **Personal care of deceased people**

You are advised not to take part in rituals or practices that bring you into close contact with the deceased. If your faith requires you to have close contact with the deceased, you need to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) under the supervision of someone who is trained in the appropriate use of PPE. Detailed guidance on care of the deceased (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>) should be followed, regardless of the setting in which personal care of the deceased is provided.

If you are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable you are strongly advised to avoid contact with the body of the deceased, even if you can wear PPE. This includes washing, preparing or dressing the body.

## **Experiencing grief or bereavement**

Whenever the loss of a friend or loved one happens, it can be an extremely difficult and challenging time. This may be even more difficult if you are experiencing bereavement and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

You may struggle not just with the bereavement, but with the impact of social distancing measures and the fact that you may not be able to say goodbye in the way that you would have wanted.

After a bereavement, you may feel waves of intense emotions as you come to terms with the loss. These can include sadness, guilt, shock and anger. All are common and there is no right or wrong way to feel. Grief affects everyone in different ways, but the important thing is to grieve and to have the right support to do this.

Learn more about grief and support available through the NHS (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>), Cruse Bereavement Care (<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>), which offers advice and support on dealing with bereavement and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic and AtaLoss.org (<https://www.ataloss.org/>), which provides signposting and services across the UK. If you are supporting a bereaved child or young person, the Childhood Bereavement Network (<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>) has information and links to national and local organisations.

## The Health Protection Regulations

This document is guidance.

The law is contained in the following Health Protection Regulations for England in 2020:

- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1374/contents>)
- Wearing of face coverings in a relevant place (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1374/contents>) (amended)
- Coronavirus Restrictions on self-isolation (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1045/made>)

For the position of what is lawful, you should refer specifically to the relevant regulations above.

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