

COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

October 2020



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This is national guidance. If local restrictions are in place in your area, check [information on local restrictions](#).

What has changed

This guidance has been updated in line with:

- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level\) \(Medium\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level\) \(High\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level\) \(Very High\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)
- [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(No. 2\) \(England\) Regulations 2020.](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place\) \(England\) Regulations 2020, amended](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(Self-Isolation\) \(England\) Regulations 2020.](#)

Changes since the last update include:

- a limit of 30 people attending a funeral at all Local COVID Alert Levels. Anyone working is not included.
- a limit of 15 people attending a linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial event in a COVID-19 secure venue or public outdoor place, where the organiser has carried out a risk assessment and taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the virus, at all Local COVID Alert Levels. Anyone working is not included.
- guidance on attendance for people who are self-isolating in exceptional circumstances with the appropriate protection advice to be followed
- allowing some professional musical contributions, ideally outdoors
- wearing face-coverings in a funeral director's vehicle

This guidance is of a general nature and should be treated as a guide, and 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.

Main principles

This advice is designed to assist people who are involved in managing or organising a funeral related to a death from any cause during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is intended to be appropriate to 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 whilst minimising the risk of infection

There is separate guidance available for [care of the deceased](#). Guidance and information on the NHS Test and Trace programme is available for [employers, businesses and workers](#) and [the public](#).

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

What you need to know

The following guidance aims to balance the needs of the bereaved to mourn with the need to minimise the spread of COVID-19 infection. Communities, organisations and individuals are strongly advised to take action to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 among mourners who gather to pay their respects, with a particular focus on protecting people who are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable and more likely to develop severe illness.

When gathering to mourn, the main concern should be to limit risks around transmission of COVID-19. Those risks increase whenever households mix. A household means those people who live together under the same roof and share facilities. If mourners do not live with the family for whom the funeral is being arranged, or are not in a support bubble with them, they need to be treated as a separate household/s and adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 include:

- limiting mourners to a maximum of 30 people at the funeral service; based on how many people the premises can safely accommodate with social distancing in place, this may need to be less than the maximum of 30 people.
- limiting mourners to a maximum of 15 people at any linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events such as a wake, ash scattering or stone setting where the organiser has carried out a risk assessment and taken

all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the virus. Only inviting close friends and family to these gatherings. See further details on [linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events](#).

- ensuring venue capacity and attendance numbers allow social distancing (at least 2 metres) to be maintained between individuals who are not from the same household or support bubble during the funeral and any linked ceremonial, belief based or social gatherings. See further details on [management of the venue](#).
- recommending remote participation instead of attendance in person by any mourners where this fulfils their needs.
- recommending remote participation by mourners who are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable.
- reminding mourners that anyone who has been instructed by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate because they or another household member have tested positive for COVID-19, or they are the close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 must not attend a funeral (unless an exemption applies for close family members) because they pose a risk to others.
- where an exemption applies for close family members of the deceased to leave their self isolation period to attend a funeral, recommending remote participation by mourners where possible. See further detail on [legal requirements to self isolate and exemptions](#).
- facilitating strict adherence to processes to minimise the risk of virus transmission to clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable mourners, should they choose to attend in person.
- enabling and assuring the wearing of face coverings by attendees as required by law when attending indoor places of worship, crematoria and burial ground chapels unless [exempt for health, disability or other reasons](#).
- ensuring staff and funeral attendees follow the advice on social distancing and wear a face covering when travelling to and from the funeral gathering. See the section on [travelling to and from the funeral](#).

Background

There is an increased risk of transmission of COVID-19 where families and communities come together, including following the death of a loved one. While recognising the importance of these rituals and gatherings, it is strongly advised that the actions detailed in this guidance are taken to reduce the spread of infection, particularly to clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable people who are at risk of severe illness.

For deaths that are suspected or confirmed as being due to COVID-19, it is recognised that household members of the deceased person may have already been exposed to COVID-19 during the course of the preceding illness. However, steps should be taken to minimise any new exposure, especially where individuals who are not part of the household and those at risk of severe illness may come into contact with the virus.

The government has advised that funeral services should continue and has requested that local authorities consider how they can facilitate this. Funerals where mourners attend in person should continue wherever it is necessary to fulfil individual needs but it remains important that those attending adhere to this guidance, the law and (any) restrictions in place.

To ensure that organisations managing funerals are able to facilitate the needs and wishes of families, it is important that funerals are not delayed. We understand how difficult funeral arrangements will be for families and friends of lost loved ones, however the current guidance will remain in place for the foreseeable future as we continue to respond to the challenges of COVID-19.

Social distancing and keeping mourners safe

Measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 include:

- social distancing: ensuring mourners stay at least 2 metres away from others outside their household or support bubble

- reminding and enabling all those present to follow strict hand and respiratory hygiene by:
 - washing their hands regularly for 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser
 - avoiding touching their eyes, nose or mouth
 - when coughing or sneezing, covering their mouth and nose with a tissue and disposing of the tissue. In the absence of a tissue, using the crook of their elbow (not hands) to cough or sneeze into
 - ensuring the wearing of face coverings, as required by law when attending indoor places of worship, crematoria and burial ground chapels unless exempt for health, disability or other reasons. Face coverings should also be worn in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing may be difficult and where attendees come into contact with people they do not normally meet. There is additional [guidance on the use of face coverings](#)
 - avoiding singing, shouting, chanting and raising voices because this may raise the risk of airborne transmission of virus. Mourners should also avoid playing musical instruments that are blown. However, some professional, socially-distanced vocal or instrumental contributions can be included, either indoors or outdoors, but outside wherever possible. Singing should be limited to a small, set group of no more than 6 people, staying at least 2 metres apart, and should not include audience participation. There is additional guidance on the performing arts
 - ensuring spoken addresses to the mourners or their responses during a ceremony are not in a raised voice and encouraging the use of microphones or similar equipment to minimise natural voice volume

Travelling to and from a funeral

Mourners should be facilitated to follow the advice on [social distancing](#) and [safer travel guidance for passengers](#) when travelling to and from the funeral. Wherever possible, mourners should be advised to travel to the venue in a car by themselves or with people from their household or support bubble. This is particularly advised for those who are clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable. If this is not possible, they should be advised to:

- share the transport with the same people each time
- keep to small groups of up to 6 people at any one time, or their household and support bubble, if larger
- open windows for ventilation
- travel side by side or behind other people, rather than facing them, where seating arrangements allow
- face away from each other
- consider seating arrangements to maximise distance between people in the vehicle
- ensure the car is cleaned between journeys using standard cleaning products, particularly door handles and other areas that people may touch
- wear a face covering. Mourners are required by law to wear a face-covering on public transport, in taxis and private hire vehicles unless they 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 or hearse. A face covering is also strongly recommended for drivers.

Who can attend a funeral?

Funeral ceremonies must have no more than 30 people in attendance. Anyone working, for example officiants, staff employed by the venue or third-party staff are not included in this number but keeping overall numbers as low as possible will reduce the risk of disease transmission and allow more flexibility in the use of spaces.

For any linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events the limit is 15 people. Anyone working is not included. Mourners should be reminded of these number limits during the planning process.

Subject to any local restrictions which may prevent it, mourners can stay overnight in someone else's home. People in the same support bubble can stay overnight with each other as they count as one household and this may be more than 6 people.

Funeral organisers should always ensure mourners maintain social distancing with anyone they do not live with or who is not in their support bubble. Organisers should also ensure mourners take particular care to maintain hand and respiratory hygiene – washing hands and surfaces – especially when using shared facilities like bathrooms.

People who are symptomatic should not attend

People who have symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell) should not attend a funeral because they pose a risk to others. They should immediately self-isolate, follow the [stay at home](#) guidance, and [request a test online](#), or by contacting NHS 119 via telephone if they do not have internet access.

People who are legally required to self-isolate (see exemption below)

Any person who has been instructed by NHS Test Trace to self-isolate because they have tested positive for COVID-19, or they are the close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should not attend a funeral because they pose a risk to others. It is a legal offence for a person who is required to self-isolate to attend a funeral except under limited exemptions.

People with a legal duty to self-isolate are:

- Anyone who is notified that they have tested positive for COVID-19. They must self-isolate (stay at home) for the period ending 10 days after they first developed symptoms or, if they did not have symptoms when they took a coronavirus test, 10 days after the date of the test.
- Anyone who is notified that another member of their household or support bubble has tested positive. They must stay at home for the period ending 14 days after that household or support bubble member's symptoms began or, if they did not have symptoms when they took a coronavirus test, 14 days after the date of the test.
- Anyone who is instructed by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate because of close recent contact with a person outside their household or support bubble who has tested positive for COVID-19. They must stay at home for the period instructed by NHS Test and Trace (which will end 14 days

after the point of most recent contact with the person who has tested positive).

Guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus infection is available.

Close family members of the deceased are exempted from the legal requirement to self isolate to attend a funeral ceremony. In this instance, we would strongly recommend that mourner(s) do not attend in person but are instead advised to attend virtually, for example through a video link.

If, after very careful consideration and with awareness of the risks they may pose to others, a mourner who is required to self-isolate chooses to attend the funeral of a close family member it is essential that all of the following precautions are taken:

- advising the funeral organiser and other mourners that they are in their self-isolation period, and ensuring that they do not attend at the same time as another mourner who may be clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable
- maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres between themselves and others at all times
- practising strict hand and respiratory hygiene by:
 - washing their hands more often than usual with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use a hand sanitiser
 - avoiding touching their eyes, nose and mouth
 - covering their coughs or sneezes
 - wearing a surgical grade Type IIR face mask or higher grade, properly fitting, to minimise any risk of viral transmission from the isolating individual. If a respirator mask is used (for example N95), this should be non-valved.

A person who is legally required to self-isolate may only break self-isolation when attending the funeral and otherwise must continue to self-isolate unless there are other circumstances present that legally allow them not to.

Mourners who are clinically extremely vulnerable

People who are [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) should have received a letter telling them they are in this group or been informed by their GP. Mourners who are clinically extremely vulnerable should be facilitated to attend a funeral, should they wish to do so, but have been advised that they should keep their social interactions low for their personal protection.

Mourners who are clinically extremely vulnerable should be facilitated to maintain strict social distancing and follow the [latest guidance available](#).

As for all other attendees, they should be advised to practise rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene in addition to their legal requirement to wear a face covering.

It is advised that other attendees are told that there is a clinically extremely vulnerable person attending and to be respectful of the vulnerable person's need to avoid close contact at any point, paying particular regard to any other mourner with a legal duty to self-isolate who has chosen to attend in person.

Additional recommended actions to reduce their risk of infection include:

- advising the mourner to travel to the venue via the safest route possible, preferably in a car by themselves, or with someone from their household or support bubble
- considering the additional risk involved if attending the funeral requires them to use public transport

Further information is available in the [guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](#).

Mourners coming from outside England

Mourners who have travelled to England within the last 14 days from countries that are not [exempt from the requirement to self-isolate](#) are required to self-isolate for 14 days from the day they were last in a non-exempt country. However, mourners can leave their place of self-isolation in [limited circumstances](#) 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).

As for all other attendees, they should be advised to practise rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene in addition to their legal requirement to wear a face covering.

Participation without attendance

Measures that allow participation in the funeral service without attendance are strongly recommended, such as allowing additional mourners to participate remotely alongside those physically present, for example, by live-streaming the service. Priority should be given to mourners who are self-isolating or who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

Management of the venue

In this section, 'the venue' is intended to mean the place where the funeral ceremony is held, including the cemetery for the purposes of burial or crematoria.

There remains an increased risk of transmission of COVID-19 where families and communities come together following the death of a loved one, from any cause. While recognising the importance of these rituals and gatherings, it is strongly advised, in order to stay safe, that mourners attending in

person are kept to a modest number and in all cases not more than 30 for the funeral and not more than 15 for any linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events.

Venue managers and mourners organising a funeral should adhere to the following points:

- venue capacity and attendance numbers must allow at least 2 metres to be maintained between individuals who are not from the same household or support bubble. Attendees should be enabled to follow guidance on social distancing.
- the maximum number of people that can attend a funeral must be restricted to 30, whether indoors or outdoors. Anyone working is not included. The venue must limit attendance based on how many people can be safely accommodated within the premises with social distancing in place. In some cases this may be less than 30 people. Venues will need to consider how to best manage this, for example including use of live-streaming for remote attendance, where possible
- the need to comply with limits on gatherings should be communicated, for example when booking the funeral or on arrival. Mourners who attend should be signposted to the advice on local restrictions.
- mourners should be reminded that they are legally required to wear face coverings in indoor places of worship, crematoria and burial ground chapels. There is additional guidance on the [use of face coverings](#). Please be mindful that there are valid exemptions for some individuals and groups not to wear a face covering in these settings or to remove it, for example if a mourner becomes distressed. Venue managers should treat such necessary actions with sympathy and understanding
- remote attendance should be facilitated particularly for mourners who are required to self-isolate (due to having symptoms of COVID-19, a positive COVID-19 test result or on the advice of NHS Test and Trace) or who are clinically extremely vulnerable
- should a person who is legally required to self-isolate choose to attend in person, the risk of virus transmission can be reduced by ensuring they observe the measures outlined above
- handwashing facilities with soap and water or hand sanitiser should be provided and signposted clearly. If venue toilets are kept open they

should be carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. This may include:

- using signs and posters to build awareness of good hygiene and social distancing practices
- limited entry approaches while not creating additional bottlenecks
- setting up and monitoring more frequent cleaning schedules including waste management and collection
- processes should be in place to allow suitable time for [cleaning and disinfecting](#) the area in which the service takes place, both before and after each service, paying attention to frequently-touched objects and surfaces using regular cleaning products
- improve ventilation as far as possible and whenever possible in order to reduce the risk of airborne transmission of the COVID-19 virus. The risk is greatest when people are close to each other, especially in poorly ventilated indoor spaces and when people spend a lot of time together in the same room
- consider how to manage the flow of groups in and out of their venues to minimise overlap between different groups and allow for adequate cleaning
- the arrangements for performances by professional singers or musicians should be agreed, ensuring they comply with social distancing and other measures to limit the transmission of virus. Guidance on [places of worship](#) has further information.
- singing should be limited to the performers and ceremonies should not include congregational singing. Venues should take account of the [performing arts guidance](#) which outlines additional mitigations such as good ventilation. Where music is to be played and recordings are available, consider using these as an alternative to live singing to mitigate risks.
- the cumulative impact of movement on public transport and in public spaces should be considered. This means consideration of further mitigation including advising mourners to avoid particular forms of transport, routes or crowded areas in transit to or from the venue
- employers should assess the use of [face coverings at work](#) on a case by case basis. Staff should follow guidance from their employer based on a workplace health and safety assessment. Public health advice is that staff should wear a face covering in enclosed public spaces where social

distancing may be difficult and where they come into contact with people they do not normally meet.

- venue managers can enter into a suitable arrangement with others carrying out services in their venue, for example funeral directors, and those leading or reading at a funeral service, ensuring that mitigations are in place and actions are taken as appropriate to the venue and detailed above

Venue managers are [strongly encouraged](#) to keep a temporary record of staff shift patterns and visitors for 21 days and assist [NHS Test and Trace](#) with requests for that data if needed, for example by displaying an official NHS QR code poster. This could help to contain outbreaks of infection.

Limits for funeral ceremonies held as part of communal worship that follows COVID-19 secure guidelines should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship. Separate guidance on places of worship is available

Linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events

A limit of 30 attendees applies to the funeral ceremony only.

For any linked religious, belief-based, ceremonial or social events that may take place before or following the funeral, such as wakes, ash scattering and stone setting, the maximum limit is 15 people in a COVID-19 Secure venue, where the organiser has carried out a risk assessment and taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the virus. This limit applies to areas at all COVID-19 alert levels.

For any such linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events taking place in private dwellings including private gardens, attendance is limited to 6 people

unless only members of one household or support bubble attend. However, this may be subject to any additional [local restrictions](#) which may be in place.

When attending any linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events, attendees should socially distance when meeting people they do not live with (or have formed a support bubble with), in line with the guidance on [social distancing](#).

Linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events where food or drink is served should take place in a COVID-19 Secure venue in the form of a sit down event with table service to support maintaining social distancing.

Attendees should also follow guidance on wearing face coverings whilst at an event in line with the guidance on [face coverings](#).

If you have been advised to self isolate by NHS Test and Trace you must not break your isolation to attend any linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events as it would be a legal offence to do so and you may be fined.

Families may consider deferring linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial events such as a wake or memorial service until further social restrictions have been lifted.

Personal care of deceased people

Mourners are advised not to take part in rituals or practices that bring them into close contact with the deceased. Where there are aspects of faith which include close contact with the deceased, that contact should be restricted to those who are wearing 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](#) should be followed, regardless of the setting in which personal care of the deceased is provided.

Given the very significant risk for clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable people who come into contact with COVID-19, it is strongly advised that they have no contact with the body of the deceased, regardless of whether they are wearing 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 for those experiencing bereavement and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bereaved people may struggle not just with the bereavement, but with the impact of social distancing measures and the fact that they may not be able to say goodbye in the way that they would have wanted. This may be particularly hard for those living alone, and it may be harder to connect with usual support networks.

Further information on grief and bereavement support are available through the [NHS](#), [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) which offers advice and support on dealing with bereavement and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic and [ataloss.org](#) which provides signposting and services across the UK. The Childhood Bereavement Network has information and links to national and local organisations.

The Health Protection Regulations

This document is guidance. The law is contained in the:

- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level\) \(Medium\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)

- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level\) \(High\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level\) \(Very High\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)
- [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(No. 2\) \(England\) Regulations 2020,](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place\) \(England\) Regulations 2020, amended](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(Self-Isolation\) \(England\) Regulations 2020.](#)

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