

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

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Contents

Introduction

What has changed

Main principles

Planning funerals and other similar events

Social distancing and keeping mourners safe

Travelling to and from a funeral

Who can attend a funeral?

Management of the venue

Linked religious, belief-based or commemorative events

Personal care of deceased people

Experiencing grief or bereavement

The Health Protection Regulations

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

On the 2nd of December 2020 the period of National Restrictions will change to a system of Local Restriction Tiers. Different tiers of restrictions apply in different parts of the country. [Find out what tier your area is in.](#)

In each of these local restriction tiers, 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.

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.

What has changed

This guidance has been updated in line with:

- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(All Tiers\) \(England\) 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.](#)

What you need to know

- Up to 30 people can attend a funeral, indoors or outdoors. Anyone working is not included
- up to 15 people can attend other religious, belief-based, or commemorative events that are linked to a person's death. This number applies indoors or outdoors and anyone working is not included. Stone setting ceremonies, ash scattering and wakes are examples of such events
- funerals and other religious, belief-based or commemorative events should take place in a COVID-19 secure venue which is permitted to open for this purpose. The venue manager must carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment and take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the virus
- close family members of the deceased who are advised to self-isolate are advised to participate in the funeral remotely, if possible. If after careful consideration of the risk, they choose to attend in person, all relevant precautions outlined in the [relevant section](#) of this guidance should be followed
- overnight stays at someone else's home to attend a funeral are not permitted unless they are part of the same support bubble. Hotels may remain open to provide accommodation for anyone attending a funeral or other religious, belief-based or commemorative event in all local restriction tiers
- crematoriums and burial grounds can remain open in all local restriction tiers.

Main principles

This advice is designed to assist people who are managing a funeral venue or organising a funeral in England related to a death from any cause during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is for people of any faith, or none.

This guidance has been developed to make sure that:

- bereaved people are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect

- funerals can continue to take place whilst minimising the risk of infection

[Guidance on arranging or attending a funeral](#) is available for the public.

This guidance remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation. 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 and clinically extremely vulnerable people 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 should follow [social distancing guidelines](#).

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 where 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 this guidance, the law and (any) restrictions in place are followed.

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 who have 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.

However, mourners may wish to consider delaying a commemorative event, such as a wake or memorial service, until current social restrictions are lifted.

Planning funerals and other similar events

Actions that should be taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19 whilst planning a funeral and other similar events include:

- Limiting mourners to a maximum of 30 people at the funeral service as required by law. 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. In order to determine this number, the funeral venue should have carried out a risk assessment
- limiting mourners to a maximum of 15 people at other religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death such as wakes, ash scattering or stone setting ceremonies as required by law. The actual number permitted at these events will be determined by the risk assessment of the venue. Different venue requirements will apply within different local restriction tiers. See further details on [linked religious, belief-based or commemorative events](#)
- advising that only close friends and family should be invited to funerals and other religious, belief-based or commemorative events
- making sure the venue manager has carried out a risk assessment and taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the virus
- making sure 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 other commemorative events linked to a person's death. See further details on [management of the venue](#)

- recommending remote participation instead of attendance in person by any mourners where this fulfils their needs, in particular those who are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable
- ensuring mourners are aware if there is a clinically extremely vulnerable person attending and the vulnerable person's need to avoid close contact at any point
- 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
- 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 because 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 the funeral, recommending remote participation by mourners where possible. See further detail on [legal requirements to self isolate and exemptions](#)
- making sure 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](#).

Social distancing and keeping mourners safe

Measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 include ensuring mourners do the following:

- Staying at least 2 metres away from others outside their household or support bubble
- 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 throwing away the tissue safely. If a mourner does not have a tissue, they should use the crook of their elbow (not hands) to cough or sneeze into
- ensuring they wear face coverings, as required by law when attending indoor venues such as places of worship, crematoriums and burial ground chapels. This applies unless an individual is 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 increase the risk of passing on the virus to people nearby
- avoiding 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.](#) Consider using instrumental music or recordings as an alternative
- 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.

Who can attend a funeral?

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

For other religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death the limit is 15 people, whether indoors or outdoors. Anyone

working is not included. Mourners should be reminded of these number limits during the planning process.

Funeral venue managers should always make sure mourners maintain social distancing with anyone they do not live with or who is not in their support bubble. Venue managers should also make sure 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 and [request a test online](#), or contact NHS 119 via telephone to request a test if they do not have internet access.

People who are required to self-isolate

Any person who has been instructed by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate because they have tested positive for COVID-19, or are a 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 under any circumstance other than the funeral of a close family member (for example a partner, parent, sibling or grandparent).

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 the funeral ceremony. In this instance, we would strongly recommend that mourner(s) do not attend in person but instead 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 venue manager and other mourners in advance that they are in their 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
- ensuring that they take extra care to keep their distance and avoid any contact with 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:
 - 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. Type IIR masks are widely available from pharmacies, supermarkets and online retailers. We advise that the mourner should provide their own face mask. Those organising the funeral may also want to ensure they have some in stock

- 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.

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

If a mourner has been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace they must not break their isolation to attend other religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death, as it would be a legal offence to do so and they may be fined.

Mourners who are clinically extremely vulnerable

People who are clinically extremely vulnerable should have received a letter (a formal NHS notification) to inform them of this. They will be advised to stay at home as much as possible but if they do choose to attend a funeral, they should inform those organising the funeral.

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. [Guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable](#) should be followed and clinically extremely vulnerable people should practise rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene in addition to wearing a face covering for their personal protection.

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 the 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
- advising the mourner to avoid public transport.

Mourners coming from outside England

Mourners who have travelled to England within the last 14 days from any country that is not exempt from the requirement to self-isolate, are required to self-isolate for the first 14 days after they arrive.

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).

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 to provide accommodation for anyone attending a funeral in all tiers, but different households should remain socially distanced within the accommodation.

Mourners should be facilitated to follow the guidance on [social distancing](#) and the 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:

- Keep to a small group from their household or support bubble
- open windows in transport for ventilation

- travel side by side or behind other people, rather than facing them, where seating arrangements allow
- face away from each other
- make sure that 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. A face covering is also strongly recommended for drivers.

Management of the venue

In this section, 'the venue' is intended to mean the place where funerals and other commemorative events are held, including the burial ground or a crematorium.

It is strongly advised that in order to stay safe, mourners attending in person are kept to a modest number. In all cases, there must not be more than 30 mourners at the funeral and up to 15 at other religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death.

Venue managers and those organising a funeral should adhere to the relevant guidelines. It is a legal requirement for the venue manager to carry out actions as appropriate under a COVID-19 risk assessment and they should take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission.

Guidance on venue capacity

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. Social distancing between attendees should be facilitated.

The venue must limit attendance at funerals and other commemorative events, 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 the maximum number permitted. 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.

Guidance on face coverings

Mourners should be reminded that they are legally required to wear face coverings in indoor locations such as places of worship, crematoriums 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.

Guidance on remote attendance

Measures that allow remote attendance should be facilitated particularly for mourners who are required to self-isolate or who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

Guidance on maintaining good hygiene practices and venue cleaning

- 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
 - establishing a one way system

- 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 people passing on COVID-19 to people near them. 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 venues to minimise overlap between different groups
- allow time for adequate cleaning.

Guidance on employee arrangements

- 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 the virus. [Guidance for the safe use of 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 lower risks
- if possible, mourners should avoid using busy forms of transport, routes or crowded areas in transit to or from the venue
- employers should follow the [guidance on face coverings at work](#) to assess their use on a case by case basis. Staff should follow guidance from their employer that should be 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 should ensure public safety measures are in place and actions are taken as appropriate to the venue as detailed above.

Venue managers are strongly encouraged to follow the [guidance for businesses on supporting NHS Test and Trace](#) through keeping a temporary record of staff shift patterns and visitors for 21 days and 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 safe use of places of worship is available](#).

Linked religious, belief-based or commemorative events

In this guidance, ‘other religious, belief-based or commemorative events’ means events linked to a person’s death, other than the funeral. This event may take place before or following the funeral. Ash scattering, stone setting ceremonies and wakes are examples of such events.

Within all local restriction tiers, other religious, belief-based and commemorative events linked to a person’s death are permitted. The maximum limit for these events is 15 people in a COVID-19 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 private gardens, [the relevant local restriction tier guidance](#) on socialising within the home should be followed. In tiers 2 and 3 this means that only members of the household or support bubble can attend.

At the event, attendees should remain seated, with table service provided to support social distancing and to minimise any risk of infection. Individuals should not touch communal or shared objects, or handle items other than one's own (for example avoid the use of shared cutlery, dishes or service sheets). Sharing of 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. Attendees should ensure that social distancing measures are observed at all times and guidance on the use of face coverings is also followed.

In tiers 1 and 2, places such as hospitality venues as well as community centres, places of worship, hotels, exhibition centres, burial grounds, cemeteries and crematoriums are permitted to remain open to hold linked events. See guidance on [Restaurants, pubs, bars and take away services](#) for more details.

In tier 3, hospitality venues are not permitted to open to hold linked events. Venues like community centres, places of worship, burial grounds, cemeteries and crematoriums can hold linked events. Areas of hotels, exhibition centres, and conference centres that are not bars and restaurants, for example conference halls or meeting rooms, may also rent space for this purpose. Only light refreshments should be served within these venues (and cannot be provided by the venue itself in tier 3).

If a mourner has been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace they must not break their isolation to attend other religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death, as it would be a legal offence to do so and they may be fined.

Mourners may consider deferring commemorative 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 support page for bereavement and loss](#). [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) also offers advice and support on dealing with bereavement and grief during the COVID-19 pandemic and [ataloss.org](#) provides links to bereavement services across the UK. The [Childhood](#)

[Bereavement Network](#) supports children through bereavement and 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 \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(All Tiers\) \(England\) 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.