

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

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Introduction

From 17 May, the number of attendees at a funeral will be determined by how many people the venue can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place. There will no longer be a maximum number of attendees defined in regulations.

Venue managers should ensure those organising a funeral are aware of the maximum capacity of the venue including staff, as this will determine the maximum number of people who will be able to attend. All reasonable measures should be put in place to keep those attending safe and to enable 2 metre social distancing between attendees.

For any religious, belief-based or commemorative events following a person's death, such as stone setting ceremonies, the scattering of ashes or a wake, the maximum number of people permitted to attend is 30. 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.

See [guidance for funerals in Scotland on GOV.SCOT](#), [guidance for funerals in Wales on GOV.WALES](#) and [guidance for funerals in Northern Ireland on indirect](#).

Main principles

This guidance has been developed to ensure that:

- people are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect when someone dies
- funerals can continue to take place whilst minimising the risk of infection

This advice is designed to assist people who are managing a funeral venue or organising a funeral in a professional capacity in England related to a death from any cause during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

It is for people of any faith or none, and aims to balance the needs of the bereaved to mourn with the need to minimise the spread of COVID-19 infection to those attending or delivering funerals. 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 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. A support bubble is defined as a close support network which links 2 eligible households.

For further information on support bubbles, please refer to the [guidance on making a support bubble with another household](#). Everyone should also follow the guidance on how to stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

For deaths where COVID-19 infection was present, it is recognised that household members of the deceased person may have already been exposed to the virus. However, steps should still 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.

Additional [guidance on arranging or attending a funeral](#) is available through Gov.uk and provides practical advice for members of the public who are attending or involved in organising a funeral in England during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Managing the event safely

For the purpose of this guidance the ‘event organiser’ is used to refer to an individual, typically a professional, who is organising the funeral or commemorative event. A funeral director is likely to fulfil this role.

The ‘venue manager’ is intended to mean the individual managing the place where funerals and commemorative events are held, such as a burial ground, crematorium or place of worship. In some instances, the ‘event organiser’ and ‘venue manager’ may be the same individual. Both event organisers and venue managers have a duty to plan, manage and monitor the event to make sure that people and staff are not exposed to health and safety risks.

It is a [legal requirement for a COVID-19 risk assessment to be completed](#) for the location in which the event is being held. This will generally be undertaken by the venue manager, though can, in some circumstances be carried out by the event organiser (or both) - for example if all or part of the event is taking place in a public outdoor space. Both parties should take all reasonable steps to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19 during the event which will include completing all responsibilities under the risk assessment.

The ‘lead mourner’ is used to refer to the individual or individuals who are working with the event organiser and/or the venue manager to set the requirements for the funeral and in most cases will be issuing invitations to the event. This is likely to be a family member or close friend of the deceased.

All parties must adhere to relevant restrictions and guidance to ensure the event takes place in a COVID-19 safe and secure way. The enforcing authority can take action against those who are not complying with relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks.

The event organiser, such as a funeral director, should ensure during the planning process that the lead mourner is aware of any restrictions in place and the [guidance for arranging or attending a funeral](#) in advance of the

event. This should include the maximum number of attendees for the event, the need to wear face coverings and travelling safely to the event. During the event, the event organiser and/or venue manager must take all reasonable steps to limit the risk of transmission. They must ensure a relevant risk assessment is conducted and taken into account and that guidance and restrictions related to funerals are also taken into account. An event organiser and/or venue manager should notify the police and/or local authority if they reasonably believe that the numbers attending are likely to significantly breach the safe capacity of the venue for a funeral, despite the steps they have taken to prevent this, or if the numbers in attendance have unexpectedly exceeded the safe capacity of the venue. The enforcing authority can then decide the most appropriate enforcement.

Planning funerals and commemorative events

The following actions should be taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19 whilst planning a funeral or commemorative event:

Managing the number of attendees at a funeral

- Establish the maximum capacity for the funeral, whether it is taking place indoors or outdoors. This will be determined by how many people the venue can safely accommodate including staff. This will be based on the [COVID-19 risk assessment](#) of the venue, and the measures put in place to limit the risk of transmission, for example through enabling 2 metre social distancing between attendees. See further detail within the [management of the venue](#) section of this guidance
- Ensure the lead mourner is aware of the maximum number of people who can attend the funeral throughout the planning process. The lead mourner should only invite the number of people the venue can safely accommodate
- Limits for funeral ceremonies held as part of a regular communal worship service will be defined by the venue's COVID-19 risk assessment. Separate guidance on the [safe use of Places of Worship is available](#).

For information on who can attend a funeral please refer to the [Gov.uk guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the Coronavirus pandemic](#).

Managing the number of attendees at a commemorative event

- Limit attendees to a maximum of 30 people at religious, belief based or commemorative events following a person's death, such as a wake, whether indoors or outdoors, not including inside private homes. Anyone working at the event is not included in this number
- The actual number of people able to attend will depend on how many people can be accommodated safely within the premises alongside staff whilst enabling social distancing between individuals based on the venue risk assessment. In some cases, this may be fewer than 30 people
- For any commemorative event that takes place indoors in a private home, in line with the wider social contact limits, the number of attendees must be limited to 6 people or more if everyone present is from the same 2 households. A household can include a linked support bubble, where eligible.

For more information on where and how to safely hold such events see the section on [religious, belief based and commemorative events](#) within the Gov.uk guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic.

Roles and responsibilities

- Ensuring that where multiple parties are involved in arranging a funeral, roles and responsibilities which fall to the close friends and family arranging the funeral, the event organiser and the venue manager are clarified. See the section on [Managing the Event Safely within this guidance](#).

Singing and spoken address during the event

- Ensure that any socially-distanced vocal or instrumental contributions take place safely, whether indoors or outdoors. If the event is taking place indoors, a group of up to 6 amateur singers, or any number of professional singers are allowed to perform. They should be enabled to socially distance from each other and others attending the event. Communal singing should not take place indoors due to the higher transmission risks.
- If the event is taking place outside, mourners may join in with singing. Further guidance for the [safe use of Places of Worship](#), [principles for safer singing](#) and [performing arts](#) is available and should be followed.
- Venue managers should ensure spoken addresses to the mourners or their responses during a ceremony are not in a raised voice. Microphones can be used but they must be thoroughly cleaned between speakers.

Social distancing and keeping people safe

- Ensure the lead mourner and other people attending the funeral are aware of the latest [guidance on social distancing and meeting with friends and family safely](#). They should be aware of the ongoing risk of spreading COVID-19 when coming into close contact with people from other households and should minimise the number of people they have close contact with during a funeral service. Further advice is available on the [actions people attending funerals should take](#) to reduce the chances of catching and spreading COVID. This includes advice on the importance of regular testing and vaccination to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19
- Ensure attendees are aware of the need to wear a face covering, as required by law when attending indoor places of worship, crematoriums and burial ground chapels unless they are exempt for health, disability or other reasons. Venue managers/ event organisers may want to ensure they have spare face coverings available. There is additional guidance on the use of [face coverings](#).

People who are clinically extremely vulnerable

If people are clinically extremely vulnerable, they will have received a letter (a formal NHS notification) to inform them of this and they may have been advised to shield in the past.

Clinically extremely vulnerable people are able to attend funerals, but are advised to consider taking extra precautions to reduce risk of exposure to the virus and to [follow the guidance for them](#).

Those who are clinically extremely vulnerable are advised to inform those organising the funeral that they intend to come.

If you become aware that someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable will be attending a funeral, you should:

- Facilitate the option of remote participation where this is possible. Encourage other attendees to remember that some people are more vulnerable than others
- Ensure people are aware that there are attendees who are clinically extremely vulnerable, and of their need to minimise close contact, especially in larger groups.

For further information see the section on people who are [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) within the Gov.uk guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the Coronavirus pandemic.

People required to self-isolate

- Reminding mourners that anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms, or is self-isolating due to a positive test result or after having been instructed by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate as the close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, should not attend a funeral and should be enabled to attend virtually where possible
- There is a legal exemption from self-isolation for the purpose of attending a funeral for close family members of the deceased (for example, a partner, parent, sibling, child of grandparent). Even in such cases, attendees are strongly encouraged to consider whether they should attend in person

and should be offered remote participation where possible to minimise the risk to others

- If someone chooses to leave self-isolation to attend a funeral, they should observe 2 metre social distancing between themselves, other attendees and anyone working at the event as well as the other steps set out in the section on who can attend a funeral within the Gov.uk [guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the Coronavirus pandemic](#).

People attending from outside the UK

- Reminding people of restrictions on anyone who has travelled to England from anywhere outside the UK, Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man and of the [requirement to self-isolate for 10 days](#) in certain circumstances
- For some individuals, there may be an exemption to self-isolation to attend a funeral. For further detail see the section on [mourners arriving from outside the UK](#) in the Gov.uk [guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the Coronavirus pandemic](#).

Travelling to and from the event

Ensure people are aware of the advice on how to travel to the event safely. See the section on travelling to and from the funeral in the Gov.uk [guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the Coronavirus pandemic](#).

Management of the venue

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

Venue capacity

It is a [legal requirement for a COVID-19 risk assessment to be completed](#) for the location in which the event is being held. This will generally be undertaken by the venue manager, though can, in some circumstances be carried out by the event organiser (or jointly) - for example if some or all of the event is taking place in a public outdoor space. All parties should take all reasonable steps to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19 during the event. This will include completing all responsibilities under the risk assessment as well as the actions outlined in this guidance, to ensure the event takes place in a COVID-19 safe and secure way.

As part of the duty on venue managers to limit health and safety risks, a safe capacity for the venue should be established which enables social distancing of 2 metres between individuals within the venue. This number should enable members of staff and anyone conducting or supporting the service to be socially distanced within the venue.

This figure should inform the number permitted safely to attend a funeral. Although some attendees may choose to sit together during the service. [Guidance on meeting family and friends](#) has been updated, with a greater emphasis on personal responsibility. Friends and family therefore may choose not to socially distance based on their understanding of the risks this involves.

However, COVID secure rules, including social distancing requirements, continue to apply in public venues, and therefore the number of people permitted within a venue should enable all individuals to be socially distanced by 2 metres, recognising that people may then choose who they have close contact with in the venue. People who are self-isolating, or in quarantine from recent international travel, may also be present at funerals, where they have a legal exemption to attend. Therefore, it is important to ensure venue capacity enables them to maintain social distance from others as appropriate.

Other elements of the COVID-19 risk assessment, such as capacity in communal areas like waiting areas and corridors, should also be considered when setting the safe capacity for a funeral service.

For events taking place outside, for example in a burial ground, venue managers should also establish a safe limit for each service. This should take into account, for example, the capacity to enter and exit the site, the limited space around the grave itself, weather conditions, and the ability to maintain social distance between services taking place at the same time.

When considering seating arrangements, venue managers and/or event organisers should consider how to enable social distancing between attendees whilst recognising that some people may choose to have close contact with others during the event.

Guidance on ventilation

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. This includes ensuring plenty of fresh air whenever possible, including by opening windows. 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. [Guidance on ventilation of indoor spaces to stop the spread of COVID-19](#) is available.

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
- Setting a safe limit within the facilities, enabling social distancing
- 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
- 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

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.

It is a legal requirement that where individuals come into close contact with members of the public, they wear a face covering, unless a relevant exemption applies.

If possible, staff should avoid using busy forms of transport, routes or crowded areas in transit to or from the venue.

Rapid lateral flow testing is now available for free for everyone in England. See the [guidance on how you can get regular rapid tests](#) if you do not have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The arrangements for performances by professional singers or musicians should be planned and agreed in advance, ensuring they are factored into the safe capacity limit for the funeral, comply with social distancing and other measures to limit the transmission of the virus. Venues should take account of the [performing arts guidance](#), [principles for safer singing](#) and [guidance on the safe use of places of worship](#), 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.

Venue managers can enter into a suitable arrangement with others carrying out services in their venue, for example event organisers or the lead mourner, to ensure all actions under the COVID-19 risk assessment are completed and all reasonable measures are in place to support the safety of attendees and those delivering funerals.

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 visitor contact details for 21 days and displaying an official NHS QR code poster. This could help to contain outbreaks of infection.

Personal care of deceased people

People 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 increased risk of severe COVID-19 illness for clinically extremely vulnerable people, it is strongly advised that they have no contact at all with the body of the deceased, regardless of whether they are wearing PPE. This includes activities such as washing, preparing or dressing the body of the deceased.

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 \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(Steps\) \(England\) Regulations 2021](#)
- [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.](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, International Travel\) \(England\) \(Schedule B1A\) \(Managed Quarantine\)](#)

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

