

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

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Summary of changes from 21 June

On 21 June, the rules on funerals and commemorative events, such as stone setting ceremonies, the scattering of ashes or a wake, changed.

There is no longer a maximum number of attendees set out in law for funerals or commemorative events. Instead, the number of attendees is determined by how many people the venue or outdoor space can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place. This is based on the [COVID-19 risk assessment](#) of the venue or outdoor space, and the measures put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Funerals and commemorative events in COVID-secure venues, such as a place of worship or a hospitality venue

In a COVID-secure venue, where the premises are operated or used by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution or a public body (such as a place of worship or a hospitality venue) the venue manager will need to tell those organising the funeral the maximum number of people who will be able to attend according to that specific venue.

Funerals and commemorative events in other venues, such as a garden of a private home

If the funeral or commemorative event is taking place in other venues, (such as a garden of a private home or on private land), the organisers will need to make the space as safe as possible with social distancing measures, liaising with the venue owner where appropriate.

If more than 30 people are attending the funeral or commemorative event, the organiser must complete a COVID-19 risk assessment to determine how many people will be able to attend with precautions in place, and should then follow this guidance to make the event as safe as possible. Please see the steps to take when holding an event in other venues, including a garden of a private home, on private land, or in a public outdoor place within the [guidance for arranging and attending a funeral or commemorative event](#) for the public. There is also guidance on [how to safely plan a funeral, wake or commemorative event in a venue](#) that is not a COVID-secure venue, including how to complete a risk assessment.

For any event which takes place indoors within a private home, in line with the wider rules for meeting indoors, up to 6 people, or more if everyone present is from the same 2 households, can attend.

Main principles

This guidance is designed to assist people who are managing a funeral venue or organising a funeral or commemorative event in a professional capacity in England related to a death from any cause during the

coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. There is [separate advice to the public on how to safely plan a funeral or commemorative event in venues such as gardens or marquees on private land, excluding indoors inside private homes](#). This guidance describes how this can be done in a manner that is safe and complies with legal requirements and social distancing guidelines. This will minimise the risk of exposure to infection for all individuals attending these events.

This guidance has been developed to ensure that:

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

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.

Everyone should also follow the [guidance on how to stop the spread of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). For deaths where COVID-19 infection was present, steps should be taken to minimise any new exposure to COVID-19, especially for individuals who are not part of the household, and those at risk of severe illness,

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 nidirect](#).

Additional [guidance on arranging or attending a funeral or commemorative event](#) 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. Everyone should also follow the [guidance on how to stop the spread of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Definitions for the purpose of this guidance

‘Commemorative event’

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.

‘Household’ and ‘Support Bubble’

A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation. A support bubble is a close support network which links 2 households. For further information on support bubbles, please refer to the guidance on making a support bubble with another household.

‘Must’

Where the guidance states that an activity must take place, this is because it is a requirement under law.

‘Should’

Where the guidance states that an activity should take place, this is not a legal requirement under law. However it’s strongly advised that consideration is given to following the advice being provided to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

‘COVID-secure venue’

A COVID-secure venue is one which is operated or used by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution or a public body, for example a place of worship or a hospitality venue, where appropriate measures will have been taken to stop the spread of COVID-19. In a COVID-secure venue, a risk assessment has been carried out, the capacity is set in line with guidance to allow for social distancing, there is adequate ventilation to bring fresh air in, and surfaces which people touch often are cleaned frequently.

‘Other Venue’

These include venues such as gardens of private homes, public outdoor places and private land. These are venues where the premises are not operated or used by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution or a public body. A marquee or other structure in a garden of a private home must have at least 50% of its walled area open at any time for it to not to be classed as indoors. This does not include inside a private home.

‘Venue Manager’

The person or persons responsible for the management of a venue where funerals and commemorative events are held, such as a burial ground, crematorium or place of worship. They have a responsibility to complete a risk assessment and an assessment of compliance with the following guidelines.

‘Event Organiser’

The person or persons, typically a professional, who is organising the funeral or commemorative event. An event organiser also has a responsibility to assess compliance with the following guidelines. A funeral director is likely to fulfil this role. In some instances, the event organiser and venue manager may be the same individual.

‘Lead mourner’

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 person who has died.

‘Visitor’, ‘attendee’ or ‘guest’

Individuals entering a venue for the purpose of attending a funeral or commemorative event.

‘Gardens of a private home’

The garden or grounds attached to someone’s home which are there for the enjoyment of those who occupy the property.

‘Risk assessment’

A risk assessment is an exercise that is carried out by the organiser or venue manager to identify potential risks at the event and then work out how to minimise the risks.

It is a legal requirement for a risk assessment to be completed. When the event is taking place in a COVID-secure venue, this will typically be completed by the venue manager.

If the event is taking place in a venue other than a COVID-secure venue (such as the garden of a private home, in a public outdoor place, or on private land), the organiser might be, for example, the venue owner or the lead mourner.

Managing the event to mitigate risk

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 venue manager, event organisers and the lead mourner must adhere to relevant restrictions and guidance to ensure the event takes place in a COVID-19 safe and secure way.

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 or commemorative event in advance of the event. This should include the maximum number of attendees for the event based on the capacity of the venue, the need to wear face coverings and the need to travel to the event while taking reasonable precautions. 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, 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. See the [section on enforcement](#) for further details.

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, or 1 metre plus with mitigations. Please see the [social distancing section in the GOV.UK guidance](#) for further information on additional mitigations. See further detail on managing the number of attendees 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 with social distancing measures in place.
- 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.uk [guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic](#).

Managing the number of attendees at a commemorative event

There is no longer a maximum number of attendees set out in law for commemorative events. Instead, the number of attendees is determined by how many people, (including guests of all ages and those working at the event) the COVID-secure indoor or outdoor venue, such as a place of worship, can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place. This is based on the risk assessment of the venue and social distancing will help keep staff and guests safe.

- Whether the event is taking place in an indoor or outdoor COVID-secure venue, the lead mourner or organiser should

discuss the safe capacity of the venue with the venue manager.

The lead mourner or event organiser should only invite the number of people the venue can safely accommodate.

- If the event is taking place at a venue where the premises are not operated or used by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution or a public body (for example gardens of private homes), up to 30 attendees (not including anyone working) may attend, without the need for conducting a risk assessment. They should nevertheless follow [guidance on how to stop the spread of coronavirus](#).
- If an event is planned for more than 30 attendees, it is a legal requirement for the person or persons responsible to take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission, taking into account the risk assessment and government guidance to make the event safe. This will generally be undertaken by the lead mourner, a family member or friend of the person who has died. This person should be someone who will be able to implement the practical steps required under the risk assessment and can attend the event itself. If they are not able to attend, a suitable person should be identified who can ensure that the event runs in compliance with the risk assessment and regulations.
- 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 mitigate risk at 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](#). Please also see guidance for the public on [how to safely plan a funeral, wake or commemorative event in a venue that is not a COVID-secure venue](#), including how to complete a risk assessment.

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](#).

Guidance on singing and spoken addresses during the event

- Ensure that any socially-distanced vocal or instrumental contributions take place with precautions, whether indoors or outdoors. If the event is taking place indoors, one group of up to 6 amateur singers should perform. Any number of professional singers may perform, provided they are socially distanced 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, people 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 attendees 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 main [guidance for arranging or attending a funeral](#). 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 locations such as 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 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. Organisers and venue managers should follow the [guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable](#).

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:

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

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 (unless an exemption applies). You should immediately self-isolate, follow the [stay at home guidance](#), and [request a test online](#), or by contacting NHS 119 via telephone if you do not have internet access.

People required to self-isolate

- Reminding people 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 or 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 titled 'People who are required to self-isolate'](#) within the GOV.UK guidance.

- Someone leaving self isolation to attend a funeral should inform the funeral venue manager, event organiser and other attendees in advance that they are in their self isolation period. It is a legal requirement for a venue manager to complete a risk assessment showing that they have taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19. This should demonstrate that someone leaving self isolation has been taken into consideration, with adequate space allowed for them to socially distance. [More guidance is available on what someone leaving self isolation must do if they are attending a funeral.](#)

People attending from outside the UK

- Reminding people that if they are travelling to England from abroad, they will need to follow the latest guidance on what to do if they are arriving from a red, amber or green list country. This applies to anyone who has travelled to England from anywhere outside the UK, Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man. You may also remind them of the [requirement to self-isolate for 10 days](#) in certain circumstances, and the requirement to quarantine in a managed quarantine hotel for ten full days if they have been in a country or territory on the red list in the last 10 days.
- For some individuals, there may be a limited exemption from self isolation to attend a funeral. For further detail see the section on

[people 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 while taking effective precautions. 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 taking all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission, taking into account the risk assessment and government guidance, to ensure the event takes place in a COVID-19 safe and secure way.

Setting capacity for a funeral

As part of the duty on venue managers to limit health and safety risks, a safe capacity for any funeral venue should be established which enables social distancing of 2 metres, or 1 metre plus with mitigations, 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.

[Guidance on meeting family and friends](#) has been updated, with a greater emphasis on personal responsibility. Some attendees may therefore choose to sit together during the service.

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, or 1 metre plus with mitigations, 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 from the Health and Safety Executive](#) is also 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. Toilets 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
- Passing objects from person to person as part of a service should be avoided
- 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 face coverings are worn by retail, leisure and hospitality staff working in any indoor area that is open to the public and where they are likely to come into contact with a member of the public, 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.

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.

Enforcement

The police, local authorities and the Health and Safety Executive have responsibilities for enforcing the rules that govern funerals and commemorative events.

The police can issue directions to individuals, break up illegal gatherings and issue fixed penalty notices against those who do not comply.

The Health and Safety Executive can provide advice and guidance and take immediate action where businesses they regulate are not managing risk. Local authorities can also provide advice and guidance, and issue fixed penalty notices (FPN) where businesses are not complying with the current restrictions.

Where businesses have failed to comply with public health regulations, local authorities also have powers to require improvements, or temporarily close premises. Additionally they can issue directions that place restrictions on events where there is a serious and imminent threat to public health.

Business venues

Venue managers must take the required precautions and conduct a COVID-19 risk assessment, which considers the government's COVID-19 guidance, including on [working safely](#) during the pandemic. Businesses are required to put in place safety arrangements for the risks identified in the assessment and must take all reasonable steps to limit the risk of transmission in order to protect their employees and others attending an event.

Other venues

Where an event is being held on a premises not operated by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution or a public body, event organisers are responsible for ensuring they have undertaken the required

precautions of carrying out a risk assessment and taking reasonable steps to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This includes events held in a private garden.

Organisers should seek to agree a person responsible for carrying out the risk assessment and ensuring the required precautions are taken. This could, for example, be the lead mourner, the venue owner or owner of the private garden. (See this [separate guidance for advice on organising a funeral, wake or commemorative event in a venue that is not a COVID-secure venue.](#))

The responsibility for undertaking the required precautions rests with all involved in the organising or facilitation of the event, to the extent of their involvement in managing the event itself. If the required precautions are not taken, organisers and facilitators may be subject to a FPN of £10,000. Enforcement officers will consider each breach on a case by case basis and give consideration as to who exercises a level of control over the event at the time of the breach.

Contractors who are working at the event must comply with public health legal obligations and are expected to have conducted a risk assessment and put in place safety arrangements relevant to their business activities under health and safety law.

Attendees should comply with current government guidance and follow requirements on table service, face coverings, social distancing, and restrictions on dancing and singing where applicable.

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 COVID-19 restrictions 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 following Health Protection Regulations for England in 2021:

- [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 and Operator Liability) (England) Regulations 2021

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