

Funerals Briefing 13 May 2021

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1. Guidance on social distancing and good hygiene to protect mourners and staff arranging and attending a funeral

This advice is based on discussions between the Government and representatives from the funeral, crematoria and burial sector in the light of COVID-19 pandemic. It may be amended if the situation and advice changes.

Individual crematorium may offer their own guidance, in the light of their own risk assessment - taking into account the design of their facilities and need to protect funeral home and crematorium staff and mourners.

You should not attend a funeral if you are self-isolating because you think you may have COVID-19. See guidance on page 4 of this Briefing and 9 July update if you are self-isolating because you live with someone who may have it.

Advice is that funerals should continue as normally as possible, with 9 July guidance asking that attendance be restricted to a 'modest' number of family and friends.

Everyone should take into account advice for minimising the risk of COVID-19 transmission to protect staff involved and those attending.

9 July Guidance describes conditions under which a gathering afterwards in the family home or any other venue may be held.

Advice to restrict COVID-19 transmission includes:

1. protect people over 70 and other at-risk groups
2. '*social distancing*' – need to ensure can keep two metres from others
3. avoid large gatherings of people
4. enable good hand hygiene, and
5. avoid unnecessary physical contact.

When planning the funeral

Reach a family consensus of what you hope could happen before contacting the funeral director. Consider:

- age and risk profile of people who would normally want to come
- social distancing requirements
- whether appropriate to have family members bearing the coffin
- services may need to be shorter so venue can be cleaned between services
- organising a celebration of life or memorial service for a later date. See 9 July updated guidance.

Work closely with your funeral director to finalise the arrangements for the day.

Consider

- provision of service sheets, as unlikely to be service books available
- recording the service if the venue has a webcam
- recording the eulogy on a phone so people who cannot attend can listen later
- clarify arrangements for after the event, for example collecting of ashes

Protocol on the day

1. Stay in your car or wait outside until asked to enter the premises by the celebrant, chapel attendant or funeral director.
2. Don't shake hands with the minister, celebrant, funeral director or other mourners
3. Bring hand sanitisers or use hygiene products made available at the venue
4. Allow cemetery and crematorium teams to open and close doors, to restrict the number of people touching the door handles.
5. Numbers in the venue are likely to be restricted. Stay seated as directed and keep a respectful distance away from each other.
6. You may be advised not to touch the coffin as you leave the service

For the latest information from professional bodies representing funeral directors, crematoria and cemeteries, see [Institute of Cemeteries and Crematorium Management](#) and [National Association of Funeral Directors](#).

Organising a meaningful funeral - Advice from Quaker Social Action 'Down to Earth' service

Down to Earth help families who are having difficulties paying for a funeral. Their website includes a very helpful section explaining COVID-19 related the changes for those arranging a funeral. It includes more technical points not covered in this briefing. The online contents are:

- 1 [Funerals during the coronavirus pandemic](#)
- 2 [Registering a death](#)
- 3 [Arranging the funeral and the service](#)
- 4 [Sharing the service with others](#)
- 5 [If you cannot attend or have a service](#)
- 6 [Collection of ashes – Scotland only](#)
- 7 [Coroners, inquests and reviews](#)

2. Covid-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

Guidance issued on 19 April supports [a letter written by Simon Clarke](#) to councils in England, asking them to work with faith groups and funeral directors to develop safe, sensitive and innovative ways for funerals to take place. [The guidance](#) (updated 22 May mentions face masks and how to make one) aims to:

- balance the needs of the bereaved to mourn appropriately, while minimising the spread of Covid-19, and
- explain where exceptions to the current '*stay at home*' guidance can be made. These exceptions only apply to circumstances relating to the death of a member of the same household, a close family member or a friend.

This guidance incorporates and expands on earlier advice, developed following discussions between Government and representatives from the funeral, crematoria and burial sector. Key areas relate to:

1. Clearer guidance on who should attend a funeral
2. Management of venue
3. Social distancing for mourners
4. Mourners who are symptomatic
5. Mourners who are 'shielding' because extremely clinically vulnerable
6. Mourners self-isolating, due to possible coronavirus case in their household
7. Personal care of deceased people
8. Support for people experiencing grief or bereavement

Clearer guidance on who should attend a funeral

9 July guidance updates this guidance on funeral attendance.

All associated with arranging a funeral are strongly advised to take action to reduce the spread of the virus. These actions include:

- restricting number of attendees to be as low as possible, so can maintain a safe distance of 2 metres between individuals alongside funeral director, chapel attendant and funeral staff, only the following should attend – members of the person's household and family members; or if the above cannot attend, close friends; attendance of celebrant if requested.

Management of venue

- Size of venue and social distancing requirements will affect attendance but aim is to keep attendance to a modest number (9 July guidance).
- Venue managers should manage flow of visitors within venue, ensure hand sanitiser available and well signposted; maximise ventilation in venue and clean and disinfect after each service.

Social distancing for mourners

Usual rules apply, including considering social distancing when travelling to and from venue.

Mourners who are symptomatic

Symptomatic mourners should not attend; live-streaming may be an option.

Mourners who are 'shielding' because extremely clinically vulnerable

Such people should have had a letter advising them to minimise contact with others for their personal protection. If they decide to attend, despite the risk to themselves, they should be helped to do so. However if other mourners are self-isolating because a household member is unwell with symptoms, they are advised not to attend.

As well as taking recognised precautions to avoid infection, ways to minimise risk of infection include choosing safest way to travel to and from the venue (preferably in car by themselves or with members of their household), and advising other attendees to maintain their distance at all times.

Mourners who are self-isolating

Aim to facilitate attendance where self-isolating mourners are yet to complete 14 day isolation period.

Such mourners should, if possible, use their own transport to the venue, follow usual social distancing and hygiene rules, and advise others they would otherwise be self-isolating if not at the funeral. They should ensure they do not attend at the same time as a mourner from the 'shielding' group.

Personal care of the deceased

There is detailed guidance on care of the deceased. Individuals in the vulnerable or shielding group are advised to have no contact with the body of the deceased, including washing, preparing and dressing them.

Support for people experiencing grief or bereavement

Recognising the effect on individuals experiencing grief or bereavement during pandemic restrictions, the guidance includes signposts to organisations offering help and support.

3. Staying overnight if attending a funeral of a close family member or friend

Advice in [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(England\)\(Amendment\) \(no3\) Regulations 2020](#) that came into force on 1 June 2020 describing the rules if staying overnight to attend a funeral has been replaced by Regulations coming into force on 5 November 2020 and described in section 9 and 10.

4. Participating in a gathering in a public or private place to attend funeral

[Regulations](#) referred to in section 3 addressed the 'rule of six' and its exceptions, one of which was when attending a funeral. Rule of six is no longer in force.

5. Covid-19: Guidance for managing a funeral during coronavirus pandemic. Update 9 July 2020

This section reflects the [updated government guidance](#), based on [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(No. 2\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#). Changes relate to attendance and events associated with funeral itself or afterwards.

9 July changes that have been superseded by latest guidance have been removed from the bulleted list on Attendance on the following page.

Attendance

- venue capacity and attendance must allow for 2m social distancing
- guidance reflects introduction of ‘*support bubbles*’
- individuals identified through ‘[test and trace](#)’ or who are [returning to UK from a country not exempt from quarantine](#) may leave their accommodation to attend a funeral. They must comply with [social distancing](#) on journeys to and from venue and with processes aiming to minimise transmission at the venue.
- where a [service is held in a place of worship](#), no more than 30 people should attend with attendance taking account of venue size, and strict adherence to rules around social distancing. This may mean fewer than 30 people.

Commemorative event following a person’s death

Regulations coming into force from 5 November 2020 describe the new rules for commemorative events following a person’s death, see section 10 for more details.

6. Covid-19: Guidance for managing a funeral during coronavirus pandemic updated 11 August 2020

This [updated guidance](#) reflects changes arising from:

- implementation on 8 August of [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#) which state unless in an exempt group, you must wear a face covering while in a crematorium or cemetery chapel, as well as in a place of worship

This guidance now reflects increasing from 7 to at least 10 days, the self-isolation period for people who have coronavirus symptoms.

7. Covid 19: Guidance for managing a funeral during coronavirus pandemic Updated 4 September 2020

This updated guidance limits to 30, the numbers who can attend a funeral at the graveside or at the crematorium, bringing this in line with attendance at a church or other religious service. The requirement to maintain a safe distance of 2m or three steps between individuals remains. It updates 9 July guidance which did not restrict numbers saying ‘*venue capacity and attendance must allow for 2m social distancing*’.

8. Local Covid alert levels published 12 October 2020

Have removed copy associated with the tier system as the three-tier system of local lockdowns was abolished with effect from 5 November.

9 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2020

[The Regulations](#) and [supporting guidance](#) cover a number of issues including funerals.

The main difference from the previous situation is: Wake-type events associated with a funeral are not listed as one of the exceptions for having a gathering. From this, we have assumed they should not take place. **But please see section 11 for update.**

- Funerals can be attended by a maximum of 30 people.

- Places of Worship can open to hold funerals. They can remain open for other specified reasons including independent prayer.
- Linked ceremonial events such as scattering of ashes or a stone setting can be held with no more than 15 people attending. They must be held at premises other than a private residence.
- Anyone working at a funeral or ceremonial event is not included in these numbers.
- The gathering organiser or manager must take the required precautions in relation to the gathering.
- The organiser or manager must carry out a risk assessment that satisfies the requirements of regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999(1) (whether or not the organiser or manager is subject to those Regulations).
- The organiser or manager must take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the coronavirus, taking into account the risk assessment and any guidance issued by the government relevant to the gathering.
- Should always maintain social distancing between people who do not live together or share a support bubble.
- Hotels, bed and breakfasts and other listed accommodation businesses can be open to provide accommodation to anyone needing accommodation to attend a funeral.
- The Regulations and guidance do not address travelling to a funeral or impose restrictions.

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

Updated guidance was published on afternoon 5 November. The list of '*linked ceremonial events*' **continues to include** wake-type events, along with ash scattering and stone setting.

It replaces 4 September guidance and revises the approach to attendance if you have been advised to self-isolate;

It adds guidance on music and singing, and on requirements when travelling in funeral director's vehicles.

It addresses staying overnight by saying people in the same support bubble can stay overnight with each other, as they count as one household. The Regulations referred to in Section 9 allow hotels and other accommodation to be open to those needing accommodation to attend a funeral, so this is also permitted.

At the end of the guidance it says: this document is guidance and the law is contained in associated Health Protection Regulations 2020. It then lists them.

Linked ceremonial events

- For any linked religious belief-based, ceremonial or social events, the maximum limit is 15 in a Covid-19 secure venue, where organiser has

carried out a risk assessment and taken reasonable steps to avoid virus transmission.

- Events associated with a funeral, where food and drink is served, should take place in a Covid secure venue in the form of a sit down event with table service to support social distancing.
- Only members of one household and their support bubble may attend if the event takes place in a private dwelling, including if in a private garden.

Attendance if advised to self-isolate

Since 9 July guidance, it has been the aim to encourage attendance of close family and friends who have yet to complete their 14 day self-isolation period - by recommending adoption of strict social distancing protocols.

Now it says

- even if you are a close family member of the deceased, we strongly recommend that you attend remotely if possible. If after careful consideration you choose to attend, it is essential you take all of the specified precautions around hand and respiratory hygiene, and strict social distancing; and advise the funeral organiser and other mourners that you are in your self-isolation period, and ensure that you do not attend at the same time as another mourner who may be clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable. This is similar to previous advice but if asked about it, we recommend you refer to sections in guidance headed *People who are required to self-isolate* and *Mourners coming from outside England*

Music if organising a funeral or similar event

- Avoid singing, shouting, chanting and a raised voice because this may increase the risk of airborne transmission of the virus.
- When organising a funeral, it now says you should:
 - ensure mourners avoid playing musical instruments that are blown. 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 2m apart, and should not include audience participation. Consider using instrumental music or recordings as an alternative to live singing. There is additional guidance on the performing arts.
 - remind mourners that spoken addresses and responses during a ceremony should not be in a raised voice and encourage the use of microphones or similar equipment to minimise natural voice volume.

Travelling to a funeral

Passengers, unless exempt, are legally required to wear a face covering when travelling in a funeral director's vehicle or hearse and it strongly recommends the driver does too. This is in line with legal requirement to wear one on public transport, in taxis and private hire vehicles.

11. COVID-19 guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic. Updated 10 December 2020

[Guidance updated on 10 December](#) reflects the introduction of local restriction tiers when second national lockdown ended on 2 December.

The tier system affects the holding of 'linked religious, belief-based and ceremonial events as follows:

- **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 remain open. 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. Can only serve light refreshments within these venues (and cannot be provided by the venue itself in tier 3).

If you have been advised to self-isolate you can, if having carefully considered the risks, attend the funeral of a close family member but you must not break self-isolation to attend a linked religious, belief-based or ceremonial event associated with the funeral. This would be a legal offense and you may be fined.

12. **Guidance on funerals, ash scattering and wakes based on (COVID-19) Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do (as of 12 April 2021)**

As of 12 April, Step 2 of Roadmap allows up to 15 people to attend commemorative events such as wakes. Step 1, introduced 8 March, allowed 6 people to attend wakes.

Funerals and linked commemorative events

- Funerals are allowed with limits on attendance, and must only take place in COVID-secure venues or in public outdoor places. The venue manager or event organiser must take the required precautions, including the completion of a risk assessment.
- Funerals can be attended by a maximum of 30 people and may take place indoors.
- Linked religious or belief-based commemorative events, such as wakes, stone settings and ash scatterings can also continue with up to 15 people in attendance in venues permitted to open.
- Anyone working is not counted in these limits. Social distancing should be maintained between people who do not live together or share a support bubble.

There is further **guidance for arranging or going to a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic** covering requirements that must still be followed and relate, for example, to mourners who are self-isolating and to mourners who have come from abroad.

13. Guidance on funerals, ash scattering and wakes based on (COVID-19) Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do from 17 May 2021

Updated funeral guidance is published within [general guidance on how rules change on 17 May in a range of areas of public life](#).

Basically, advice is to think in terms of 30 people maximum for funerals and if in any doubt, speak to the funeral director or venue owner, as they must ensure their facilities meet requirements to be Covid-19 secure, and allow for social distancing as appropriate.

Linked religious or belief-based commemorative events, such as wakes, stone settings and ash scatterings can be arranged with up to 15 people in attendance.

Social distancing should be maintained between people who do not live together or share a support bubble.

You can read the guidance by clicking on hyperlink above.
The specific funeral guidance is yet to be updated.

14. COVID-19: guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic updated to reflect rules from 17 May 2021

The [specific funeral guidance](#) has been updated as follows.

At Step 3, from 17 May, the number of attendees at a funeral will be determined by how many people the venue can safely accommodate, based on a COVID-19 risk assessment, and measures put in place to limit the risk of transmission, for example by enabling social distancing between individuals. There will no longer be a maximum number of attendees.

You should establish the safe capacity of the venue with the venue manager whilst organising the funeral, as this will define the maximum number of people who will be able to attend. All reasonable measures should be put in place to maintain social distancing and keep those attending safe.

Guidance goes on to say this may mean a funeral becomes a large event, so it is especially important to take precautions in the presence of others outside your household or support bubble, in order to keep you and your loved ones safe.

It reminds people that vaccines reduce (but do not eliminate) the chances of catching COVID-19 and passing it on, and of serious illness. It highlights recognised steps that can minimise transmission of the virus such as:

- covering nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing
- minimising the number of people you come into close contact with and for how long, particularly those outside your household, or bubble
- following face covering guidance when indoors
- testing regularly will help to reduce risk, particularly before meeting people from outside your household, and you can [order free home tests](#) for you and your loved ones that give results in 30 minutes.

People should continue to ensure they minimise the risk when travelling to the event by following the [safer travel guidance](#). People should also follow the additional safe travel guidance if they are clinically extremely vulnerable.

If leaving self-isolation or quarantine to attend the funeral you should avoid using public transport if possible.

Linked religious, belief-based or commemorative events such as wakes

From 17 May, a maximum of up to 30 people may attend such events. This does not include anyone working at the event.

Events of up to 30 people can take place *outdoors* (including in private gardens) or *indoors* in a COVID-secure venue. The actual number of people will depend on how many people this venue can accommodate safely.

If hosting a commemorative event in a private home up to 6 people can attend, or more than six people if everyone present is from 2 households - which is in line with wider indoor social contact limits. Each household can include an existing support bubble, if eligible.

The rule not to attend a commemorative event if you have been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or are in quarantine after recent international travel, still applies. You must not break your isolation to attend any commemorative events. This would be a legal offence and you may be fined.

Food and drink at commemorative events

From 17 May, food and drink can be provided by a venue or caterer, whether the commemorative event takes place indoors or outdoors.

You may provide your own food and drink but should ensure actions are taken to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

At the event, you should remain seated and take steps to minimise any risk of infection. You should not touch communal or shared objects, or handle items other than your own (for example, avoid use of shared cutlery, dishes or service sheets).

If venue or caterer serves alcohol, table service is required by law, meaning people must order, be served and eat or drink while seated, even if no alcohol is ordered.

If venue or caterer does not serve alcohol, people can order and collect food and drink from a counter, but must consume food and drink while seated. If you are providing your own alcohol at your event, this should be consumed while seated.

END