

Guidance - Funeral Homes and COVID-19

Public Health measures (e.g. physical distancing) have been put in place to contain the spread of COVID-19 and to mitigate the societal and health care system impact of the disease. These restrictions affect funerals and burials as well as cemetery and crematorium operations, even when the death is unrelated to COVID-19.

Regardless of the cause of death, death care providers should consider the use of virtual technologies (e.g. telephone, video conference, video recordings) in place of in-person services and gatherings. These technologies allow for broader inclusion and participation and are currently being practiced in many areas of the country.

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing measures are approaches taken to minimize close contact with others in the community. These include quarantine and self-isolation, avoiding common greeting practices like hugging and handshakes, avoiding crowds, cancelling public/mass gatherings, and implementing workplace measures and closures.

There are many practices Funeral Home Directors can take to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to keep staff, families and visitors safe and healthy.

At the funeral home:

1. Limit the number of family members making arrangements to no more than 15 persons;
2. Restrict visitation to the immediate household and up to 20 persons from other households (not counting funeral home staff);
3. Refrain from in-person signing of the guest book and taking memorials/donations. Instead, use online mechanisms for people to offer condolences and give memorials/donations;
4. Funeral and/or memorial services can occur. Organized gatherings of up to 50 persons are permitted to be held at an indoor or outdoor location provided businesses, services or organizations follow the Organized Gatherings Guidance (<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/health-and-wellness/multiple-gatherings-guidance>).
5. Cancel and abstain from hosting all public visitation and receptions;
6. Set up your space to accommodate appropriate physical distancing of at least 2-meters or 6 feet from all individuals, at all times;
7. Do not permit shaking hands, hugging, etc.;
8. Encourage hand washing by making available alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with a minimum of 60% alcohol content) or access to washrooms that are always well stocked with liquid soap and paper towels;
9. Have extra tissues on hand and a hands-free waste basket for disposal;

10. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, table-tops, bathrooms and other surfaces; and
11. Staff in Long-term Care facilities and Nursing Homes must refrain from creating receiving lines to honour the decedent.

*Based on the guidance, staggering visitation is permitted. Enhanced cleaning and physical distancing must be followed.

*If you are contemplating having more than one gathering at one time in a facility (indoor or outdoor), consult the Multiple Gatherings Guidance (<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/multiple-gatherings-guidance>).

At burials and cemeteries:

1. Organized gatherings of up to 50 persons are permitted to be held at an indoor or outdoor location provided businesses, services or organizations follow the Organized Gatherings Guidance (<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/health-and-wellness/multiple-gatherings-guidance>).
2. Do not permit shaking hands, hugging, etc.;
3. Practice physical distancing of 2 metres/6 feet between individuals and/or households.

*Vehicles are permitted at the cemetery. Individuals should not exit their vehicle or gather as this may exceed the maximum outdoor gathering limit. **This practice is at the discretion of cemetery operators.**

Infection Prevention and Control

Decedent with COVID-19: Family Contact

- Transmission occurs primarily from person-to-person through respiratory droplets (e.g. coughing, sneezing). Transmission may also occur via contact with contaminated services.
- People should consider not touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19
- Older people and those with underlying medical conditions need to practice extra caution when in the presence of someone who has passed away due to COVID-19.
- There may be less chance of the virus spreading with hand touching or hugging after the body has been prepared.
- Kissing, washing and shrouding should be avoided.
- Always perform hand hygiene after touching a COVID-19 decedent.

~Please note that any guidance shared is subject to change.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. COVID-19 and Funerals [Online] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. March 12th 2020. [Cited: March 16th 2020.] <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#funerals>

Public Health Agency of Canada. Interim guidance: Death care services and handling of dead bodies during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. April 13th 2020. [Cited: April 14th 2020]