

WHAT IS COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Patients with COVID-19 have experienced mild to severe respiratory illness, including fever, cough and shortness of breath. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel (new) coronavirus. It is not the same as other types of coronaviruses that commonly circulate among people and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

HOW DOES COVID-19 SPREAD?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

ATTENDING FUNERALS

Funeral homes, crematories and morticians are essential providers and authorized to perform within their scope of duty to take charge and remove deceased persons from their places of death, prepare a deceased person for final disposition in any manner and make arrangements, provided that such arrangement comply with the Emergency [Executive Order](#) and social distancing guidelines.

- Individuals may leave home to attend funerals, as long as the gathering is no larger than 10 people; regardless of location while in assembly. Based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, public visitation should be contained to 10 people rotating at a time while maintaining six feet of social distancing. The space utilized must account for social distancing (6 feet of space between people).
- If possible, venues should make accommodations for remote attendance for others. Individuals who are at high risk for COVID-19 are strongly encouraged to attend remotely.
- While attending a funeral, follow proper hand hygiene protocols: wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water is not available; soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled; avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands; avoid close contact with people who are sick.

PREVENTIVE ACTIONS FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORES INVOLVING COVID-19

Funeral homes are authorized to meet with families to make arrangements for final disposition but should do so by telephone or remotely if possible. If funeral homes must meet with families, they should practice social distancing consistent with the CDC [guidelines](#).

Funeral arrangements should be limited to no more than 10 people, unless otherwise specified by the county. Each county may limit a specific number under 10 people to be in attendance at funeral home and/or gravesite. It is at the decision of the funeral home whether they would allow 10 attendees to rotate during funeral visitations.

A funeral or visitation service can be held for a person who has died of COVID-19 with certain restrictions. Persons who have COVID-19 or are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should be restricted from attending the funeral service or

visitation to prevent its spread to others who are attending. Try to provide ways for family members or close friends to join the service remotely through use of available technology or offer to record the funeral service for later viewing.

Decedents with COVID-19 can be buried or cremated but check for any additional state or local requirements that may dictate the handling and disposition of the remains of individuals who have died of certain infectious diseases. Guidelines for coroners are available [here](#).

PREVENTIVE ACTIONS FOR FUNERAL HOME WORKERS HANDLING DECEDENTS

Funeral home workers may potentially be exposed to the COVID-19 virus if they are entering homes or other locations. They may not know if a person has died from COVID-19 or if other persons at the same location have COVID-19. Unless the funeral home worker knows that they will not be exposed to COVID-19 when traveling to handle a decedent, it is recommended that they follow standard precautions and use PPE that has been recommended for emergency medical service employees.

Funeral home workers should follow routine infection prevention and control precautions when handling a decedent who died of COVID-19.

- Follow standard precautions when transferring a body to a bag, including PPE if splashing of fluids is expected.
- Disinfect the outside of the bag with a product on the [EPA's List N](#): Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- Wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling the body bag.
- Body bags and removal pouches should be properly disposed after they are used, unless manufacturer's instructions allow for reuse after proper cleaning and disinfection.
- During embalming, follow standard precautions including the use of additional PPE if splashing is expected (e.g. disposable gown, face shield or goggles and facemask).
- Wear appropriate respiratory protection if any procedures will generate aerosols or if required for chemicals used in accordance with the manufacturer's label.
- Wear heavy-duty gloves over nitrile disposable gloves if there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds or other injuries that break the skin.
- Additional information on how to safely conduct aerosol-generating procedures is in the [CDC's Postmortem Guidance](#).

Cleaning should be conducted in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Use EPA-approved disinfectants on the List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2, or with a human coronavirus claim. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The ISDH call center for healthcare providers and members of the public who have concerns about COVID-19 is staffed 24/7; call toll-free: 877-826-0011.

Additional information and resources for COVID-19 are available below.

- ISDH COVID-19 webpage: <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- CDC COVID-19 webpage: <http://coronavirus.gov>