

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, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. 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. The risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age, with older adults at highest risk.

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 for 15 minutes or longer) 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. The best way to protect yourself and to help reduce the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 is to limit your interactions with other people as much as possible and take precautions to prevent getting COVID-19 when you do interact with others. Those steps include wearing a face covering, maintaining social distance of 6 feet and washing your hands frequently. If you start feeling sick and think you may have COVID-19, get in touch with your healthcare provider within 24 hours.

LEVELS OF RISK FOR SPREADING COVID-19

The risk of COVID-19 spreading at gatherings and services is ranked as follows, from lowest to highest:

Lowest risk: Virtual-only services and gatherings.

Lower risk: Smaller outdoor, in-person services and gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear cloth face coverings, do not share objects, and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).

Higher risk: Medium-sized in-person services and gatherings, either indoors or outdoors, adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, with some individuals wearing face cloth coverings and with some attendees coming from outside the local area. Sharing of items or objects is limited.

Highest risk: Large in-person services and gatherings held indoors and where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart; many attendees travel from outside the local area. Few individuals wear cloth face coverings and objects are shared.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 by following these guiding principles.

- The more people interact, the closer in distance the interaction is (less than 6 feet), and the longer the interaction lasts, the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- The [higher the level of community transmission](#) in an area, the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- [Cloth face coverings](#) help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19, particularly if social distancing cannot be maintained.
- During an in-person gathering, convene in outdoors or in well-ventilated areas, if possible, rather than poorly ventilated, indoor areas, to help lower risk of spreading COVID-19. Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings.
- Avoid sharing commonly used objects such as religious aids (e.g., religious books, collection plates, programs, etc.) to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Reducing the number of people who are engaged in activities like singing or chanting as these behaviors can increase the amount of respiratory virus in the air.
- Practice increased hand hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces and objects to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Practice [social distancing](#) by maintaining at least 6 feet between attendees; facility or lay staff; and clergy or officiants, especially when small, in-person services are held.
- Take extra precautions for those at [increased risk for COVID-19](#), particularly those who are older or have pre-existing conditions, to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.

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 Indiana's [Back on Track](#) and social distancing guidelines.

Religious services, including funerals, may continue and will no longer be subject to limits on social gatherings. However, social distancing and other sanitation measures will continue to apply. Visitations or other gatherings before or after funerals remain subject to the limitations and restrictions for social gatherings.

- 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.
- There is no limit for the number of individuals attending a funeral, but consider the following practices:
 - Ask all individuals who are 65 and above or who have an underlying at-risk health condition to stay home and watch services online
 - Ensure 6 feet between individuals or family units of the same households during services and wear a cloth face covering

- Consider limiting the number of people engaged in activities that produce respiratory droplets, which may contain virus, (e.g., singing or chanting) especially when participants are indoors and in close proximity to each other. If attendees choose to sing or chant, encourage them to wear cloth face coverings and increase distance between people to greater than 6 feet
- Space and mark seating, alternating fixed rows or extending the distance between movable seating when possible
- Place hand sanitizers in high-contact locations (e.g. bathroom, entry, exit) and ask staff, members and guests to sanitize their hands before entering the building
- See Gov. Eric J. Holcomb’s Executive Order [20-37](#) for face covering requirements.
- Consider placing signage telling staff, members and guests to not enter if they are symptomatic or if they tested positive for COVID-19
- Avoid handing out materials
- Attendees should nod, bow, or wave instead of holding or shaking hands, hugging or kissing anyone who does not live in their household
- Avoid touching, hugging, or kissing the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19 before and during body preparation, especially if you or a member of your household are at [higher risk](#) of severe illness from COVID-19. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after any contact with the body. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Consider holding services and gatherings in a large, well-ventilated area or outdoors, as circumstances and traditions allow
- Consider modified funeral arrangements, such as limiting attendance at funerals held during shortly after the time of death to a small number of immediate family members and friends; and then holding additional memorial services when social distancing guidelines are less restrictive
- Considering modifications to funeral rites and rituals (for example, avoid touching the deceased person’s body or personal belongings or other ceremonial objects) to make sure of everyone’s safety
- Gatherings following a funeral service should follow public gathering applicable to the opening stage of the county. More information on public gathering guidelines can be found on <https://BackOnTrack.in.gov/>. Please note that your county may have opted to be more restrictive.
- 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.

GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

Grief is a normal response to losing someone important to you. When a loved one dies, it is important for friends and family to be able to share stories and memories of the person and how they influenced their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the ability of friends and family to come together in person and grieve in typical ways. This is true regardless of whether the person’s death was due to COVID-19 or some other cause.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, hosting gatherings now could be dangerous to those who would want to participate. Family and friends are finding alternate ways to connect, support each other, and grieve after their loss. They understand the need to possibly plan for additional memorial services when COVID-19-related restrictions are lifted.

Take actions to help you cope with the loss of a loved one

Grief is a universal emotion, but no two people experience grief in exactly the same way. Some actions you can take to help you cope with feelings of grief while practicing social distancing and honoring your loved one include:

- Invite people to call you, or host conference calls with family members and friends to stay connected.
- Ask family and friends to share stories and pictures with you via phone, video chat, email, text message, photo sharing apps, social media, or mailed letters.
- Create a virtual memory book, blog, or webpage to remember your loved one, and ask family and friends to contribute their memories and stories.
- Coordinate a date and time for family and friends to honor your loved one by reciting a selected poem, spiritual reading, or prayer from within their own households. Some cultures practice a prolonged mourning period with multiple observances, so hosting virtual events now and in-person events later may be in keeping with these practices.
- Seek spiritual support from faith-based organizations, including religious leaders and congregations, if applicable. People who are not part of a faith tradition or religious community can seek support from other trusted community leaders and friends.
- Use grief counseling services, support groups, or [hotlinesexternal icon](#), especially those that can be offered over the phone or online, or seek support from a mental healthcare provider.
- Read books about grief and loss. If you have children, read age-appropriate books with them and talk with them about how they are feeling.
- Take part in an activity that has significance to you and the loved one you have lost, such as planting flowers or a tree or preparing a favorite meal, in memory of your loved one.
- Review additional information from CDC on loss and grief, and [ways to cope with stress and anxiety](#).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the family and close friends of a person who died of COVID-19 may experience [stigma](#), such as people avoiding them or rejecting them. Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear or anger toward other people. Some people may avoid contact with you, your family members, and friends when they would normally reach out to you. You can help stop stigma related to COVID-19 by [knowing the facts](#) and sharing them with extended family, friends, and others in your community.

Visit [Be Well Indiana](#) for information and resources compiled by the Indiana Division of Mental Health and Addiction designed to help Hoosiers stay connected and maintain their well-being. These resources have been validated by local and national experts to ensure that you have access to reliable information that you can trust.

PREVENTIVE ACTIONS FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS INVOLVING COVID-19

Funeral homes are authorized to meet with families to make arrangements for final disposition but should consider doing so by virtual or phone meetings if possible. If you need to meet in person, follow [everyday preventive actions](#) to protect yourself and others from COVID-19, such as wearing a [cloth face covering](#), [social distancing](#), [washing your hands often](#), and covering coughs and sneezes. Do not attend in-person meetings if you are sick or if you might have been exposed to COVID-19. Those who have [higher risk of severe illness](#) should weigh the benefits of in-person attendance against risk of exposure to a person with COVID-19, especially if recommendations for wearing cloth face coverings and social distancing may be difficult to follow for themselves or others.

A funeral or visitation services can be held 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.

In general, there is no need to delay funeral services and visitations due to COVID-19. However, some changes to traditional practices are likely needed. Family members may need to discuss timing of services with funeral service providers, who may be overwhelmed.

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](#).

Take precautions with rituals that involve touching the deceased person's body. If the deceased person had confirmed or suspected COVID-19, avoid kissing, washing, or shrouding the body before, during, and after the body has been prepared, if possible. Take precautions if participating in these activities is part of important religious or cultural practices. There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral service or visitation with the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19 after the body has been prepared for viewing.

- Work with your cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff to identify how to reduce exposure. Preserve traditional practices when it is possible to safely do so, and identify whether modified or new practices could satisfy the needs and values of the family and their loved one.
- People at [higher risk](#) of severe illness from COVID-19 and members of their household should not be involved in these activities.
- People conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves (nitrile, latex or rubber). Additional protective equipment may also be required, such as disposable and waterproof isolation gowns, face shields or goggles, and facemasks (e.g., if splashing of fluids is expected).
- Following preparation of the body, [safely](#) remove gloves (and other protective equipment, if used) and throw them away. Immediately [wash your hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Shower as soon as possible.
- If you did not wear an isolation gown while preparing the body, wash your clothes in the warmest setting possible and dry them completely.

- If removing personal possessions (such as wedding rings) from the body or casket, clean and [disinfect](#) the items and wash hands right away.

Consider changing traditional rituals or practices

Discuss with the clergy or officiant, and the family any potential changes that might be necessary to protect all of the participants and attendees. Consider options for modified or new practices that would be acceptable to the family and friends, such as:

- Holding a graveside-only service.
- Changing or removing funeral practices that involve close contact or sharing things among members of different households, such as:
 - Sharing a car or limousine ride between the church and cemetery.
 - Providing food and beverages for attendees after the service.
- Changing religious rituals in consultation with clergy and other religious leaders.

If some traditions, such as certain religious rituals, sharing rides to the gravesite, or having food and beverages, are considered essential to the family and friends, consider modifying them.

- Limit sharing of items, such as worship aids, prayer books, and other items shared or passed by clergy and attendees during religious rituals.
- Group household members together inside the vehicle. Avoid having non-household members sharing vehicles to travel between locations during the services; if necessary, increase ventilation by opening windows or using the air conditioner on non-recirculating mode.
- If food is offered at a reception, have individual pre-packaged boxes or bags instead of a potluck, buffet, or family-style meal. Avoid sharing of foods and utensils

In some cultures, bringing food or gifts to grieving family members is an important way to express care and concern. During the COVID-19 pandemic, consider expressing care in ways that do not involve personal interactions. Consider delivering food or gifts to grieving family members in ways that keep people at least 6 feet apart, mailing care packages, or giving families gift cards for food delivery services.

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 N95 respirator).
- 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.).

After cleaning and removal of PPE, perform [hand hygiene](#) by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using 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.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

- Funeral Guidance for Individuals and Families: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/funeral-guidance.html>
- Funeral Home Workers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/funeral-faqs.html>
- ISDH COVID-19 webpage: <https://coronavirus.in.gov/>
- CDC COVID-19 webpage: <http://cdc.gov/coronavirus>

If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others:

- Call 911
- Visit the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#), call 1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUsto 66746
- Visit the [National Domestic Violence Hotlineexternal icon](#) or call 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224
- Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, call 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), or use the online [Lifeline Crisis Chat](#)
- Be Well Indiana Crisis Hotline: Call: 211, enter your ZIP code and press: 3