



Updated Preventive Actions for Funerals, Visitations, and Memorials

This guidance provides updated recommendations for funeral directors, community and religious leaders, and others who will arrange, conduct, or attend funerals, visitations, and memorials (services) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Illinois, people have become ill with COVID-19 after attending services. To prevent the spread of COVID-19 at services, there must be strict adherence to preventive measures, such as ensuring that people who should be in isolation or quarantine do not attend in-person services (including family members of the deceased person), limiting the size of the gathering, practicing social distancing (spacing participants six (6) feet apart), and wearing masks throughout the service.

Recommendations for holding services during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Recommended:** Virtual-only services and gatherings.
- **For in-person services:** Outdoor, graveside services and gatherings are recommended. Participants must remain spaced at least six (6) feet apart, wear masks, and not share objects.

The higher the level of community transmission in an area, the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19. The size of services should be determined by the metrics in the [region](#)¹ in which they will take place. **The guidelines for each region are subject to change. During Tier 3 mitigation, in-person services are limited to no more than 10 loved ones of the deceased person. This limit does not include funeral home or facility staff, cemetery staff, clergy, or officiant.**

Preventive Actions for the General Public Arranging or Attending a Funeral, Visitation, or Memorial

This guidance provides strategies for the general public when arranging or attending a service.

Strategies include:

¹ Illinois Regional COVID-19 Resurgence Criteria. <http://dph.illinois.gov/regionmetrics?regionID=1>

- Stay home if you have any [symptoms of COVID-19](#) as people with mild symptoms can transmit the virus to others.
- Do not attend an in-person service if you should be in isolation or quarantine due to COVID-19 illness or exposure.
- People at [increased risk for COVID-19](#), particularly those who are older or have pre-existing conditions, should consider not attending an in-person service.
- During an in-person service, convene either outdoors or in well-ventilated areas, rather than in poorly ventilated indoor areas.
- Limit attendance at in-person services to a small number of participants in accordance with mitigation tiers for the [region](#).
- Hold an additional memorial service in the future.
- Use technology to connect virtually with family and friends.
- Maintain at least six (6) feet between participants, the funeral home or facility staff, cemetery staff, the clergy, and the officiant when small, in-person services are held.
- Plan graveside services to prevent participants from different services being in close proximity with each other (less than six (6) feet).
- All participants, funeral home or facility staff, cemetery staff, the clergy, and the officiant should wear a mask at all times.
- Avoid sharing commonly used objects (e.g., religious books, collection plates, programs).
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer frequently.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.
- Utilize pre-recorded music and readings rather than having participants sing or chant.
- Personal greetings involving person-to-person contact should be discouraged.
- Food or beverages should not be served.

Refer to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Funeral Guidance for Individuals and Families](#)² for additional strategies.

In-person services may be held if the deceased person had confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a service with the body of a person who died of COVID-19, according to the CDC². A service can be held for a person who has died of COVID-19 with certain limitations. Family members or other close contacts of the deceased person who are in isolation or quarantine cannot attend in-person services.

² Funeral Guidance for Individuals and Families. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/funeral-guidance.html>

Participants should consider not touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19. There may be less of a chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging, after the body has been prepared for viewing.

If possible, other activities, such as kissing, washing, and shrouding, should be avoided before, during, and after the body has been prepared. If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible.

People conducting these higher risk activities should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required (such as a disposable gown, face shield or goggles, and a face mask).

Preventive Actions for Funeral Home Workers

Funeral home workers may be exposed to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, when transporting the body of a deceased person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. According to the [CDC Funeral Home Workers](#) guidance, workers should follow standard precautions and use PPE recommended for emergency medical service (EMS) personnel.³ When inside a home or facility, funeral home workers should maintain social distancing of six (6) feet or more and request that others present wear a mask.

If the deceased person has died from COVID-19

The Illinois Department of Public Health's Control of Communicable Diseases Code, requires the body of any individual who died from a known or suspected communicable disease, including COVID-19, to be labeled as "Infection Hazard", or an equivalent term, to inform persons having subsequent contact with the body, including any funeral director or embalmer, to take suitable precautions.⁴ The label must be prominently displayed on and affixed to the outer wrapping or covering of the body, if the body is wrapped or covered in any manner. The attending physician or coroner who certifies death is responsible for labeling the body. If the death occurs in a health care facility, then a staff member designated by the administrator of the facility is responsible for labeling the body.

When lifting and moving the body of someone who has died from COVID-19, the face of the deceased person should be covered temporarily with a disposable surgical mask or cloth mask due to the possibility that air may be expelled from the body. After the body has been placed in a bag, disinfect the outside of the bag with a product on the [U.S. Environmental Protection](#)

³ What do funeral home workers need to know about handling decedents who had COVID-19?
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/funeral-faqs.html>

⁴ 77 Ill. Adm. Code 690.1200, <https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/077/077006900H12000R.html>

[Agency's \(EPA\) List N: Disinfectants for Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)⁵. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting products (e.g., concentration, application method, and contact time). Once the body and body bag have been placed into the transport vehicle, funeral home workers should remove their gloves and wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol before driving the vehicle.

Embalming deceased persons who have died from COVID-19

According to the CDC, embalming may be conducted even if the deceased person has died from COVID-19. Because embalming procedures generate potentially infectious aerosols, safety precautions, including enhanced ventilation and respiratory protection, are required to minimize the hazards. Funeral home directors or embalmers over the age of 65 or with pre-existing medical conditions should consider the risks of embalming deceased persons who have died from confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

Additional resources for professionals

The CDC has issued [postmortem guidance](#)⁶ on best practices for autopsies and embalming.

The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) has published [comprehensive COVID-19 technical information](#)⁷ for embalming and expert [videos for funeral professionals](#)⁸ explaining embalming safety protocols, including guidance on how to minimize aerosolization of fluids.

The U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has issued [guidance for postmortem workers and employers](#).⁹

⁵ <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-coronavirus-covid-19>

⁶ Collection and Submission of Postmortem Specimens from Deceased Persons with Known or Suspected COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html>

⁷ NFDA COVID-19 Technical Information. <https://nfda.org/covid-19/technical-information>

⁸ NFDA COVID-19 Practical Guidance Webinars. <https://nfda.org/covid-19/practical-guidance-webinars>

⁹ COVID-19 Control and Prevention for Postmortem Care Workers and Employers. <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/postmortem-care.html>