

# FAQS FOR FUNERAL HOME OPERATORS

## Are funeral services considered an ‘essential service’?

Funeral services are considered ‘[essential](#)’ and include businesses providing funerals, cremations, transfers and burial services, as well as any related goods and products (such as coffins and embalming fluid).

## Can funeral homes have visitations and funerals?

Yes. Funeral homes are permitted to have small visitations and funerals, limited to 10 or less people at any given time. York Region Public Health recommends that all persons be [screened for symptoms](#) and a history of any international travel that may be related to COVID-19. Funeral homes should remind guests and families to practice [physical distancing](#) to manage the spread of illness.

Funeral homes and customers may wish to consider lower risk alternatives (e.g., direct cremation, deferring the funeral, staggering or splitting the visitation and/or video conferencing).

## Is it safe to attend a visitation or funeral for the person who died of COVID-19?

While there is currently no known risk of being in the same room as the body of someone who died of COVID-19, 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. For that reason, family or guests should not touch or kiss 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.

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted from an infected person to others through respiratory droplets.

## How to prevent guests/family from getting COVID-19 or other respiratory infections when attending a funeral home

- Maintain [physical distancing](#) by placing a separation of at least 2 metres (6 feet) between you and others
- Avoid shaking hands and hugging
- Encourage attendees to practice good respiratory etiquette (sneezing/coughing into tissue or elbow) and hand hygiene (frequent [hand washing](#) with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer)
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Consider using technology wherever possible to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus, instead of attending a visitation or funeral in-person

**PUBLIC HEALTH**

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## **How can staff in funeral homes protect themselves from COVID-19?**

- Encourage staff to stay home when they are sick
- Practice [physical distancing](#) by staying at least 2 metres (6 feet) from others
- Practice good respiratory etiquette (e.g., sneezing/coughing into tissue or elbow) and hand hygiene (e.g., frequent [hand washing](#) with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer)
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Clean and disinfect highly touched surfaces (e.g., door knobs, light switches) frequently and follow [Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting](#) and [Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting](#)
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) use – conduct risk assessment to determine if PPE is required. Follow [this guide](#) for proper PPE usage.

## **What precautions should be taken when transporting or receiving a body?**

For transporting or receiving a body after the body has been bagged, disinfect the outside of the bag with an approved disinfectant. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time). Disposable nitrile gloves are used when handling the body bag.

## **Can bodies that have died of COVID-19 be embalmed?**

Yes. Embalming can be conducted using routine precautions. COVID-19 is spread by respiratory droplets and contact. Therefore, ensuring routine droplet barrier precautions, environmental hygiene, and overall sound infection prevention is the best way to prevent infection. For more information, refer to [Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting](#) and [Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting](#).

## **Can disposition be carried out?**

A person who died of COVID-19 can be buried, cremated or hydrolyzed as usual. Refer to your local municipal by-laws, [Routine Practices in the Bereavement Care Setting](#) and [Additional Precautions in the Bereavement Care Setting](#) for more information.

## **Can religious or cultural practices be carried out during this COVID-19 pandemic?**

As 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 to identify ways to reduce their direct contact exposure with the body as much as possible. As these activities involve touching the body, as a precaution, people conducting these activities on a body who had the COVID-19 infection should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required, such as a disposable gown and a mask and goggles or face shield.

## **Resources**

- [Bereavement Authority of Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance: Funeral and Bereavement Services](#)
- [York Region Public Health](#)