

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Guidance for bereavement

Version 13



City of Westminster

We appreciate that this is a very difficult time and the loss of a loved one due to coronavirus can be particularly distressing. We would like to reassure you that we are here to support you and ensure, where possible, that your needs and wishes are met.

We are working with our partners to ensure that mourners and people who work in related services are supported and protected, and that the risk of spreading infection is reduced.

We appreciate that this will prompt a number of further questions about current procedures in relation to death. The information in this document will be regularly updated in line with the latest government advice.

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Coping with loss and bereavement

Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and can be very painful and confusing. Support and resources are available to those in need.

The bereavement care charity Cruse is helping families affected by coronavirus. You can find a broad range of guidance, including easy-read fact sheets, on the [Cruse website](#).

You can contact the charity's free national helpline on **0808 808 1677** or email them at helpline@cruse.org.uk

You can also find support and information through the following:

- **CCIWBS:**
[Bereavement and loss counselling in North London](#)
- **The Compassionate Friends:**
[Supporting bereaved parents and their families](#)
- **The Good Grief Trust:**
[Coronavirus bereavement advice](#)
- **Mayor of London:**
[Coronavirus bereavement and grief advice](#)

Childhood Bereavement Network has published advice on supporting a bereaved child during coronavirus. You can find a range of guidance, including a short film and tips about talking to children, on [their website](#).

If your loved one dies in hospital

1. A doctor will complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) form. This will then be scanned and emailed to the Council's Register Office. There is no need to collect this.

2. You are legally required to register a death within **five days**. The Registrar will contact you directly to make arrangements to register by telephone.

If you haven't heard from the Registrar, you can book an appointment [here](#) or by phone on **020 7641 7500**.

3. You can find industry inspected local funeral directors on [The National Association of Funeral Directors \(NAFD\)](#) and [The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors \(SAIF\)](#) websites. Alternatively you can contact the NAFD by phone on **0121 711 1343**.

4. The Registrar will then issue a form for burial or cremation by email to your chosen funeral director or burial society. The funeral director will then arrange the burial or cremation in accordance with your wishes, as far as possible.

5. If your loved one dies in hospital, they will be taken to a mortuary either at that hospital or at another location such as a funeral home. The bereavement team within the hospital will let you know where your loved one has been taken.

6. Sadly we are unable to promise that you will be able to view your loved one. If they are taken to a mortuary it will not be possible for you to visit them. If they are taken to a funeral parlour your funeral director will be able to advise on whether visiting is possible. We understand that this may cause unimaginable distress at this time of grief but the guidance is in place to ensure that families and mourners are not put at risk.

If the death took place outside of the City of Westminster, you will need to contact the register office for the area in which the death took place. You can find the relevant register office by entering the postcode of the place of death on the [government's General Register Office webpage](#).

If your loved one dies at home or elsewhere outside of hospital

1. If your loved one dies at home of known COVID-19, please call your **GP or out-of-hours service**. They will arrange verification of death and will complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) form. If the death is unexpected, but suspected to be COVID-19 related, please phone **999**. The operator will provide instructions on what you need to do. The police and trained clinicians will come to your house and will submit a sudden death report.
2. You should contact your chosen funeral director to arrange the collection of your loved one. You can find industry inspected local funeral directors on [The National Association of Funeral Directors \(NAFD\)](#) and [The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors \(SAIF\)](#) websites. Alternatively you can contact the NAFD by phone on **0121 711 1343**.
3. A doctor, usually your loved one's GP, will complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) form. This will then be scanned and emailed to the Council's Register Office. There is no need to collect this.
4. You are legally required to register a death within **five days**. The Registrar will contact you directly to make arrangements to register by telephone.

If you haven't heard from the Registrar, you can book an appointment [here](#) or by phone on **020 7641 7500**.
5. The Registrar will then issue a form for burial or cremation by email to the funeral director or burial society you have chosen. The funeral director will then arrange the burial or cremation in accordance with your wishes, as far as possible.
6. Sadly we are unable to promise that you will be able to view your loved one. If they are taken to a mortuary it will not be possible for you to visit them. If they are taken to a funeral parlour your funeral director will be able to advise on whether visiting is possible. We understand that this may cause unimaginable distress at this time of grief but the guidance is in place to ensure that families and mourners are not put at risk.

If the death took place outside of the City of Westminster, you will need to contact the register office for the area in which the death took place. You can find the relevant register office by entering the postcode of the place of death on the [government's General Register Office webpage](#).

Information you need to register a death

Please see below a list of individuals who can register a death:

- A relative
- A person who was present at the death
- A social worker, bereavement officer or nursing home matron or administrator if the death occurred in a hospital or nursing home
- The person arranging the funeral if there are no relatives available
- The funeral director (under the provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020)

For a telephone registration please make sure you know the information listed below. You might find it helpful to write it down in advance, or have documents such as passport, birth certificate, and marriage certificate (if applicable) on hand.

Details of the deceased:

- Date and place of death
- First name, middle names (if applicable), and surname
- Any other names the deceased was otherwise or previously known by
- Maiden name (if applicable)
- Date and place of birth
- Occupation and whether they were retired
- Address

Details of the spouse/civil partner of the deceased (if applicable):

- First name, middle names (if applicable), and surname
- Date of birth
- Occupation
- Whether they are retired

Guidance for funerals

The high number of deaths – coupled with the ongoing risk of infection during the pandemic – has changed the way that funerals can be carried out. While most the COVID-19 restrictions have now been lifted, it is important that we all take steps to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19. Relatives are still advised to consult with their funeral director, faith, belief and/or community leader for guidance on how the funeral should be conducted.

The latest government guidance for funerals and commemorative events states:

- There are no longer limits on the number of people who can attend funerals or linked commemorative events (such as ash scattering or stone setting).
- You do not need to stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with, and venues are not required to follow social distancing rules. However, keeping your distance and limiting close contact can help reduce the risk of catching or passing on COVID-19.
- Face coverings are required by law in most indoor public places. This includes places of worship, community centres, crematoria and burial ground chapels.
- Face coverings are not required outdoors and wherever possible outdoor funerals and commemorative events are recommended.

[Read the full GOV.UK guidance for arranging or attending a funeral](#)

There are actions you can take to reduce the chance of spreading COVID-19 and help keep you and your loved ones safe. This includes:

- Not attending the funeral in person if you have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms (a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste).
- Choosing to limit how many people you come into close contact with, and for how long. The more people you are in close contact with – particularly if they are from different households – the higher the chances of you catching or passing on COVID-19.
- Washing your hands and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Wearing a face covering in specified indoor public places as well as in crowded or enclosed spaces.
- Letting fresh air in. You may want to consider if you can have the funeral or commemorative event outdoors.
- Getting fully vaccinated. Remember that vaccines reduce (but do not eliminate) the chances of catching COVID-19 and passing it on, and of serious illness.
- Testing regularly, even if you don't have symptoms. Testing regularly will help to reduce risk, particularly before meeting people from outside your household.
- Unless an exemption applies, you should not attend the funeral if you are self-isolating, or are in quarantine. Please refer to the additional guidance on page 10.
- Consider that others may wish to take a more cautious approach. If you're clinically extremely vulnerable, you may wish to think carefully about the particular risks associated with attending a funeral. Please refer to the additional guidance on page 10.

[Read the full GOV.UK guidance for arranging or attending a funeral](#)

Attending a funeral if you are self-isolating, or are in quarantine:

There are legal exemptions that permit you to briefly leave self-isolation or quarantine in order to attend a funeral. These allow you to:

- Briefly leave self-isolation for the purpose of attending the funeral of a close family member, household member or friend (if neither a close family member nor household member can attend).
- Briefly leave home or managed quarantine for the purpose of attending the funeral of a close family member or household member.

You must not break your isolation or quarantine to attend a commemorative event.

To reduce the risk to others present at the funeral, you are strongly advised to consider arrangements to participate remotely to avoid attending in person. If you still choose to attend in person, please follow the guidance on page 9.

[Read the full guidance on GOV.UK on attending a funeral if you are in self-isolation and quarantine](#)

Actions to reduce the risk of infection to at-risk groups at funerals could include:

- Advising other attendees that there is a clinically extremely vulnerable person attending, and to be respectful of the vulnerable person's need to minimise close contact at any point, especially in larger groups. This is particularly important if anyone with a legal duty to self-isolate has chosen to attend in person.
- Meet outside if possible and make sure indoor spaces are well ventilated.
- Consider asking mourners to take a symptom-free lateral flow test before attending a funeral or commemorative event where vulnerable people will be in attendance.
- Mourners who are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable should practise rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene at all times but particularly whilst outside their household.

[Read the full GOV.UK guidance for arranging or attending a funeral](#)

[Read the full GOV.UK guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable](#)

Guidance on commemoration during coronavirus

There are many options that may allow mourners to participate remotely in burials and cremations and/or to commemorate the person who has died. These include livestreaming or filming the funeral service, online memorial gatherings and virtual books of remembrance. Please contact your funeral director, faith, belief and/or community leader to discuss the options available.

To reduce the risk to others, all charitable collections in memory of a loved one can be done online. Please contact your chosen charity or organisation who will be able to advise you on how to arrange online donations. Your funeral director, faith and/or community leader may also be able to support you with this.

Celebrants and burial customs

The council is working with faith leaders and community organisations to offer support and to ensure that, wherever possible, family wishes will be honoured.

Please find below additional resources and guidance that you might find helpful:

- **Muslim Council of Britain:**
[Coronavirus Guidance for Mosques & Madrassas](#)
- **Inter-Faith network of United Kingdom:**
[Faith Communities and Coronavirus](#)
- **Church of England:**
[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) guidance for churches](#)
- **The Baptist Union of Great Britain:**
[Guidance for Worship](#)

Funeral directors will do all they can do to follow religious customs. Please note that since there is a small but real risk of transmission from the body of a deceased person, mourners are strongly advised not to take part in any rituals or practices that bring them into close contact with the deceased if they have died from or with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). Contact with the deceased should be restricted to those who are wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) under the supervision of someone who is trained in the appropriate use of PPE.

Given the very significant risk for vulnerable and extremely vulnerable people who come into contact with coronavirus (COVID-19), it is strongly advised that they have no contact with the body of the deceased. This includes washing, preparing or dressing the body.

Please contact your funeral director, faith and/or community leader regarding any specific religious funeral arrangements and they will be able to provide guidance on these.

Financial guidance and support

We recognise this is a difficult time for everyone, putting many people in unexpected financial circumstances. Please contact your funeral director to discuss the different services available and, if required, the financial assistance they offer.

If you have not chosen a funeral director, you can find industry inspected local funeral directors via the following websites:

- [The National Association of Funeral Directors \(NAFD\)](#)
- [The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors \(SAIF\)](#)

The Children's Funeral Fund for England can help to pay for some of the costs of a funeral for a child under 18 or a baby stillborn after the 24th week of pregnancy.

For more information visit the [government webpage on support for child funeral costs](#).

You may be eligible for a Funeral Expenses Payment (also called a Funeral Payment) if you get certain benefits and need help to pay for a funeral you are arranging.

For more information, visit the [government webpage on getting help with funeral costs](#).