

# Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Guidance for bereavement

Version 04



City of Westminster

We appreciate that this is a very difficult time and the unexpected 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.

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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.

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**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](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)

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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](#)

**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](#).

Please visit the [government's webpage on support for the bereaved](#) for translated information and further services and organisations that can support you and your family.

## 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**. You will need to register the death yourself with the Westminster Registration Service. The service is not currently open for face-to-face registrations, however all deaths can be registered by telephone appointment if a registrar hasn't already contacted you directly.

To book an appointment [click here](#) or phone **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**. You will need to register the death yourself with the Westminster Registration Service. The service is not currently open for face-to-face registrations, however all deaths can be registered by telephone appointment if a registrar hasn't already contacted you directly.  
To book an appointment [click here](#) or phone **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. Relatives are advised to consult with their funeral director, faith and/or community leader for guidance on how the funeral should be conducted.

## National restrictions from 5 November to 2 December:

- It is advised that only close friends and family attend the funeral, to reduce the risk of spreading infection.
- Linked ceremonial events (such as ash scattering or stone setting) in a COVID-secure venue or public outdoor place are limited to 15 people and must not take place in private homes.
- The actual number of people able to attend will depend on how many people can be safely accommodated within the premises with social distancing. In some cases, this may be fewer than 30 people.
- Social distancing (of 2 metres) should be maintained between people who do not live together or share a support bubble.

To ensure organisations managing funerals are able to cope with the number of deaths, it is important that people **do not delay funerals**. We understand how difficult this will be for the families and friends of lost loved ones, however restrictions will be in place **for the foreseeable future for public safety reasons**.

**To protect yourself and the professionals carrying out a funeral, please take the following into consideration:**

- It is advised that only close friends and family attend, to reduce the risk of spreading infection.
- Anyone who is showing coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms (a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste) should not attend the funeral as they pose a risk to others.
- If you have been instructed by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate because you have tested positive for COVID-19, or you are the close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should not attend a funeral. Please refer to the additional guidance on page 10.
- Those who are clinically extremely vulnerable should also be facilitated to attend, should they wish to do so. Mourners in at risk groups should minimise their contact with others for their personal protection. Please refer to the additional guidance on page 10.
- Anyone attending a funeral should observe social distancing guidelines, including:
  - ensuring that you are at least two metres (three steps) away from others
  - following the guidance on hand hygiene and preventing the spread of infection.
  - wearing a face covering when attending indoor places of worship, crematoria and burial ground chapels unless exempt, as required by law. You should also wear a face covering in other enclosed spaces.
  - Avoiding singing, shouting and chanting because this may increase the risk of airborne transmission of the virus.
- Follow the advice on social distancing when travelling to and from the funeral gathering and wear a face covering if you travel on public transport.
- Do not publicly advertise the funeral details in order to reduce the risk of other, well-meaning mourners arriving unexpectedly.

**If you have been instructed by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate because you have tested positive for COVID-19, or you are the close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should:**

- › Attend remotely to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading to other mourners. It is a legal offence for a person who is required to self-isolate to attend a funeral under any circumstance other than the funeral of a close family member.

**Even if you are a close family member of the deceased we strongly recommend that you attend remotely if possible. However, if after careful consideration of the risk, you choose to attend in person, it is essential that you:**

- › Only break self-isolation if attending the funeral of a close family member and otherwise must continue to self-isolate.
- › Maintain a distance of at least two metres between yourself and others.
- › Advise the funeral organiser and other mourners that you are otherwise self-isolating at home, and ensure that you do not attend at the same time as another mourner who may be clinically extremely vulnerable.
- › Practise strict hand and respiratory hygiene.
- › Not attend any ceremonial events such as ash scattering or stone setting.
- › Remember that any mourner who comes into close contact with you may then be required to self-isolate.

Those who are in an clinically extremely vulnerable group should have received a letter telling them that they are in this group or been told by their GP. Those who are clinically extremely vulnerable should also be facilitated to attend a funeral, should they wish to do so. Mourners in at risk groups should minimise their contact with others for their personal protection.

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

- › Advising other attendees that there is an clinically extremely vulnerable person attending, and to be respectful of the vulnerable person's need to avoid close contact at any point. This is particularly important if anyone with a legal duty to self-isolate has chosen to attend in person.
- › Advising the mourner to travel to the venue via the safest route possible, preferably in a car by themselves, or with someone from their household.
- › Considering the additional risk involved if attending the funeral requires travelling by public transport. If you travel by public transport, you must wear a face covering.
- › 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.

## 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 and/or community leader to discuss the options available.

In addition, it may be helpful for families to plan a deferred celebration or memorial service for their loved one which could be held after the social restrictions are lifted at a time when attendance and shared mourning can safely take place.

To reduce the risk to others, all charitable collections in memory of a loved one should 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.

The council is committed to following London Funeral Standards, which can be found on this [webpage](#). The London Funeral Standards have been developed to provide those who have lost loved ones assurances that the marking of life will take place with respect, dignity and compassion and to do so while minimising the risk of spread of infection. They have been developed under consideration for people of all faiths and beliefs and for those of none.

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 24<sup>th</sup> 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](#).