Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for bereavement
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.

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

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 suspected COVID-19 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. You should contact your chosen funeral director to arrange the collection of your loved one.

2. 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.

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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.

**Government guidance states that only the following should attend a funeral, alongside the funeral director, chapel attendant and funeral staff:**

- Members of the person’s household.
- Close family members.
- If the deceased has neither household or family members in attendance, then it is possible for a modest number of friends to attend.
- Attendance of a celebrant of choice, should the bereaved request this.

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 this guidance 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:

- 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.

- Anyone who is self-isolating for 14 days due to someone in their household being unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or has been contacted by NHS Test and Trace that they have been in close contact with someone with coronavirus but are not symptomatic themselves can attend the funeral in person should they wish to do so, with processes put in place to minimise the risk of transmission. Please refer to the additional guidance on page 10.

- Those who are extremely clinically vulnerable or in a shielded group 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.

- 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 are self-isolating due to a possible case of coronavirus in your household or have been contacted by NHS Test and Trace that you have been in close contact with someone with coronavirus you should:

- Not attend if you have any symptoms of any kind, even if these are very mild.
- Maintain a distance of at least two metres between yourself and others.
- Advise 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 extremely clinically vulnerable.
- Practise careful hand and respiratory hygiene.
- Use your own transport where possible.

Those who are in an extremely clinically vulnerable group should have received a letter telling them that they are in this group or been told by their GP. Those who are extremely clinically vulnerable or in a shielded group 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 extremely clinically vulnerable person attending and reiterating the need to stay at home if they are unwell, and to be respectful of the vulnerable person’s need to avoid close contact at any point.
- 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.
- Ensuring that mourners who are in a clinically vulnerable group do not attend the same ceremony as mourners who are in household isolation.
- Mourners who are clinically vulnerable or extremely clinically 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 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.