



Advice for funeral directors

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the 'What you need to know' and 'Advice for organising public gatherings' information sheets found at www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources. See the Department of Health website for more information on how to stop the spread of COVID-19. Visit <https://www.health.gov.au/news/launch-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-campaign>

Handling of bodies

There is no evidence of an increased risk of transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 to funeral industry workers who handle the bodies of those suspected of having, or confirmed to have, died from COVID-19.

Funeral workers should always use routine body handling and infection control precautions when handling any deceased bodies. Handling of bodies, including transportation and disposal, should occur in line with the relevant legislation.

The greatest risk of transmission to funeral industry workers is likely to be through contact with family and friends of the deceased. For more information on stopping the spread, visit <https://www.health.gov.au/news/launch-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-campaign>

Infection control procedures and personal protective equipment

Funeral workers should follow standard infection control and occupational health and safety guidelines at all times. A person must, when carrying out any procedure on a body, comply with the guidelines specified in Part 3 of the [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare \(2019\)](#) as published by the National Health and Medical Research Council. Further, any person having contact with the body of a person suspected of having, or confirmed to have COVID-19, must wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) similar to that recommended for healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 during life. This includes:

- water resistant protective outer garment such as a gown
- disposable gloves
- surgical mask
- appropriate eye protection

After use, PPE should be placed in a clean plastic bag and laundered as soon as possible. Alternatively, it can be disposed of as clinical waste.

Transportation

There are no special requirements for transporting deceased bodies other than those required in the relevant State and Territory regulations. When transporting the deceased, the body must be placed and secured in a leak-proof body bag to prevent leakage of body fluids.

Embalming of bodies

It is not clear whether embalming is safe to do on people who have died from, or with, COVID-19. Embalming is not recommended for bodies who died from, or with, COVID-19.

If embalming must be done, the embalmer should be certified and trained in the use of PPE consistent with contact and airborne precautions. This includes a P2/N95 respirator which has been fit-checked, gown, gloves and eye protection.

Advice for religious or ceremonial preparation and funeral practices

Any funeral practices in which members of the family or members of the community, who are not certified employees of the funeral service; closely handle the deceased, wash and / or wrap the deceased, or conduct any practices which involve purging the stomach contents of the deceased; are not recommended.

Funeral directors should inform persons who closely handle the deceased, wash and / or wrap the deceased, or conduct any practices which involve purging the stomach contents of the deceased to:

- Avoid direct contact with body fluids and mucous membranes of the deceased.
- Be instructed on how to wear, use and remove appropriate PPE by a person trained in their use.
- If purging stomach contents:
 - Wear a disposable waterproof apron or gown, goggles, surgical mask and disposable impermeable gloves during the washing procedure
 - Wear waterproof shoes that can be disinfected (e.g. gumboots) or disposed of.
 - Change gloves after the expulsion of stomach contents and washing the body with water
 - After the final wash, wipe the outside of the body with a TGA listed disinfectant with claims of activity against enveloped viruses
 - After placing the body in the coffin, wipe the outside of the coffin with diluted bleach and allow to air dry
- Place the body in a leak-proof body bag to prevent leakage of body fluids before wrapping the body. Wrap the body as normal, over the body bag
- Remove PPE immediately after handling the body and place it in a clean plastic bag. The facility should ensure it is disposed of as clinical waste

Persons who closely handle the deceased, wash and / or wrap the deceased, or conduct any practices which involve purging the stomach contents of the deceased must wash their hands with liquid soap and water immediately after removing PPE. Clothing worn during any washing procedure should be removed before leaving the facility and placed in a plastic bag, tied closed, and laundered as soon as possible.

Cremation of bodies

Funeral directors must comply with the relevant State or Territory legislation with regards to disposal of bodies. There is no evidence of an increased risk of transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 during cremation and routine body handling. Infection control precautions should be used when handling any deceased bodies.

Body viewing

Family members should be allowed to view the body and standard precautions should be observed. Family members should be advised not to kiss the deceased. If family members touch the body, they should wash their hands immediately afterwards or use an alcohol-based hand rub. Gloves are not necessary unless there are visible bodily fluids present on the body.

How can we help prevent the spread of COVID-19 at a funeral?

Like any public gathering, there is potential for transmission viruses between those attending a funeral, and consideration should be given those who are, or a likely to have been, contacts of patients with COVID-19. Funeral directors should consider delaying the service so that family members or critical attendees who require quarantine or isolation for COVID-19 can attend.

To minimise transmission of COVID-19, the funeral director must comply with Australian Government and State or Territory public health direction on public gatherings, and should consider the type and size of the gathering. For example, attendance may be restricted to close family and friends, the gathering may be held in an open-air venue instead of an enclosed space, or alternative ways to conduct services may be considered such as via video link. For more information read our information on [public gatherings](#).

Practising good hand and respiratory hygiene is the best defence against most viruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19. Funeral directors should encourage and facilitate all attendees at a service to:

- wash hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- practise good respiratory hygiene and cover coughs and sneezes with their elbow or a disposable tissue, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand rub immediately
- avoid physical contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people, avoid hugging and kissing)
- if unwell*, stay at home or, if attending the service is essential, do so for as short a time as possible and stay more than 1.5 metres from others

***Note:** this advice applies to people generally. Anyone who has had close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19, or who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, should follow public health advice about testing and self-quarantine or isolation.

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of your state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to your doctor.

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness—not coronavirus.