



Indiana Funeral Directors Association

1305 W 96th Street, Suite A

Indianapolis, IN 46240

317-846-2440 | 800-458-0746 | fax 317-846-6534

IFDA Coronavirus (COVID-19) ADVISORY-UPDATE

Monday, March 16, 2020

The last 72 hours has been an unprecedented time in our country, filled with anxiety and uncertainty, along with a never-ending flow of information, much of which is well intended, but somewhat confusing. As the Coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19, evolves in the United States, information has been moving faster than it can be disseminated. As an association, we are mindful and judicious in balancing between providing information in a timely, useful manner versus impulse overreaction every time information is put forth thereby adding to the confusion. Today, we would offer this Advisory Update for your careful consideration.

Last week on Thursday March 12, 2020, Gov. Eric Holcomb set forth the State of Indiana's official emergency declaration to the Coronavirus-COVID19. Within the protocols set forth (see *IFDA E96th email and IFDA Facebook posts from 3/12/20*) was a classification of non-essential gatherings limited to no larger than 250 people.

Since Thursday's gubernatorial announcement, the Center for Disease Control, "CDC", has significantly lessened their recommendation for gathering sizes to less than 50. The Center for Disease Control is strongly encouraging you to implement application of this limit; **IFDA supports this recommendation fully**. Below are some links you will find helpful as you prepare and work during the next several weeks:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/index.html>

https://www.in.gov/coronavirus/?mc_cid=52855cf398&mc_eid=523b04d11a

<http://www.state.in.us/isdh/>

<https://www.nfda.org/covid-19>

On Friday afternoon, March 13, President Donald Trump declared a National Emergency in a continued effort to further stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus across our country. Since

Friday, our President, Vice-President, and their strategic team of advisors have updated Friday's declaration twice as this situation remains fluid and in a constant state of change. An update from the President, Vice President, and this task force will be forthcoming later today, Monday March 16, 2020.

While this situation locally and nationally currently remains in a dangerous, yet manageable position, time and application of recommended preventative protocols is acutely critical, as this could change rapidly and potentially overwhelm our healthcare system, especially if preventative protocols are not followed and adhered to. It is the fundamental responsibility of every citizen to do their part to help suppress the spread of this virus. It has been reiterated on multiple occasions in the weeks leading up to today that we should expect many to be infected by COVID-19 in the United States.

Likewise, it has been communicated that during the virus escalation time period, which could be several weeks, we could expect the number of active cases to double every 3 to 4 days. Our best defense is an offensive mindset of personal responsibility, highly focused on personal hygiene and with exposure limitation being of the highest priority.

As Sunday worship services are being temporarily suspended, schools and universities nationwide eliminating in-person classroom instruction for the remainder of the semester moving to e-learning platforms, a sizeable portion of the workforce largely telecommuting for the foreseeable future, tradition-rich national and local events are being cancelled every day, we all are having to make temporary adjustments and sacrifices for the collective good of our country. This cautious, preventative mindset could prove to be the difference between a truncated-in-duration pandemic event with minimized negative outcomes or a national catastrophe with lasting effects far into the future if we fail to prudently yield. We are fortunate to have opportunity and choice in how the outcome plays out.

With a deep respect for your professional passion and mission in caring for your community, public funeral events ARE, and must be for the immediate future, considered non-essential gatherings by the Governor's definition and are equally applicable to the latest CDC suggested less than 50 person gathering suggested protocols. (see link above)

The questions from your perspective now are "how do we handle public funeral events in light of this ever evolving COVID-19 situation? How do we potentially limit attendance? How do we discuss the scenarios with families in our care? What are the best practices and limits of what we should do?"

Professionally, you have a multi-point duty of care. This duty of care is equally and lawfully to public health and welfare; reverent, dignified care of the deceased; and compassion to those who grieve. This is a responsibility that each of you are well versed in and the experts of.

Under normal circumstances, this requires much of you; times such as these challenge your stewardship beyond your known limits. As your association, below is suggested "Best

Practices” which we feel require consistent attention and engagement. IFDA encourages you to implement the following:

- 1.) Be the voice of reason and calm in your communities; amidst the chaos and uncertainty be the commonsense beacon that your community expects and knows you to be.
- 2.) Establish lines of communication with your local, county-led emergency management officials. Each county should have in place an emergency management plan which probably has been implemented by now. These resources will become invaluable if the situation begins rapidly changing as they are tied into a large statewide plan. In times such as these, communication and implementation are the keys to success.
- 3.) We strongly advocate and encourage you follow the guidelines closely (they are ever-changing) that the President, our Governor, the Indiana State Department of Health, and the CDC are recommending in handling the COVID-19 virus, including encouraging co-workers and employees who feel sick to stay home, with additional heightened focus on hygiene and cleanliness, and give special attention to limiting size of public assemblies. (see links above)

While there currently is no mandated moratorium on public visitations and funerals, as the size restrictions are still only recommendations, public funeral events naturally have heightened potential to be “hotspots” for transmission and spreading of the COVID-19 virus. It is reasonable to expect future restrictions to be mandated for funeral-related events

With the transient nature of attendees, if exposure were to occur, it could potentially be accelerated due to the multitude of directions and destinations the attendees would travel to or frequent after the funeral event concluded.

- 4.) Be ever mindful that your statutory duty of care in its most fundamental form is public health and welfare. All that you say and do relates back to this responsibility. In working with those who have died, experienced loss, the public, and those who are co-workers and employees of the funeral home, advocate, in writing and action, adherence to prevailing recommendations and mandates, most especially hygiene and restrictive assemblies/gatherings.
- 5.) Review guidelines and be staunch advocates of OSHA Universal Precautions within all environments you interact.
 - Check engineering controls for prep room ventilation system that it is functioning and meeting OSHA standards for air circulation for PPM and recommended hourly air exchanges of 6 for existing structures and 12 for renovated or new construction, negative pressure to the surrounding areas of your funeral home, and exhausting directly to the outside of your building or passing of air through a HEPA filter

- Practicing **Respiratory Protection guidelines** as prescribed by **OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134**
- Practicing **Bloodborne Pathogens guidelines** as prescribed by **OSHA 29 CFR 1910.1030**
- Practicing **Personal Protective Equipment guidelines** as prescribed by **OSHA 29 CFR 1910.132**

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/hospital/hazards/univprec/univ.html>

- 6.) Ensure that Personal Protective Equipment, “PPE” is in proper use and replenished. We are aware the possibility of shortages. Be diligent and creative in seeking solutions which may include use of your current funeral suppliers, non-traditional suppliers to you, on-line purchasing (Google PPE equipment), and collaborating with neighboring funeral providers to pool resources.
- 7.) Make focused cleaning and disinfection of person and spaces a top priority and a constant, ongoing process throughout the day. Cleaning soaps, hand soaps, hand sanitizers available and monitored for replenishing. Handshakes and hugs should be discouraged, personal distance awareness encouraged. Protecting those who are most compromised with underlying health conditions including requiring employees and co-workers to remain home if they are in high risk categories and/or encouraging reduced workforce/work from home whenever possible.
- 8.) In your funeral homes, through posted signage, through your on-hold messaging, on your websites and social media platforms be proactive with advocating for prudence and careful considerations as services are planned and events considered using the suggested and mandated protocols as a resource to proper decision making. Please use the links provided to embed into your own communication platforms.
- 9.) Think in terms of how your duty of care is applied in best practices and exposure; significant exposure points requiring constant best practice management include:
 - **First Call** interactions at institutions and homes-potential “hotspots” for the virus; you have no known data about person or place prior to engagement with them; personal protection at all times through use of PPE
 - **Initial contact with decedent**-the environment the decedent is received from and where your care begins. State of Washington’s largest known concentration of virus, causing multiple deaths, was in a nursing home.

- **Vehicles** in which you transport decedents can become incubation sources if not cleaned after every use. Make sure that vehicles are well stocked with cleaning supplies to assist in maintain a virus-free environment
- **Preparation of decedent and containment of preparation environment**- thorough disinfection of all cavities/orifices with special attention to nasal, oral, and general aspiration of the body.
 - There is little known about the duration of the virus living in a deceased individual therefore error on side of caution is paramount.
 - Personal decontamination is paramount at all times when exiting a preparation room environment; please be extra conscious of this when caring for a body potentially infected with COVID-19.
 - Containing infectious waste from your preparation area including that which accompanied the deceased from their place of death and that which was created in the preparation of the decedent.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html>

- **Arrangement conferences and interaction with family members:** with little knowledge of where people are arriving from or what they have been exposed to, limiting the number of people at the in-person arrangement conference or even conducting conference over telephone, video conferencing, or with at least significant space between persons during the conference itself are all prudent policy positions.
- **Public gatherings/funeral-related events:** think in terms of using technology to potentially help minimize large gatherings. Tools such a Zoom, Skype, Facebook Live, potentially private events now with public events later type of planning should be prioritized over public events.

If an event with limited attendance (private event, graveside, etc.) is planned, discourage physical interaction among those in attendance with the deceased COVID-19 person including touching, kissing, dressing of the decedent. If religious custom requires involvement with the deceased, be extra cautious in the disinfection of the body prior to interaction.

Likewise, advocate for limited interaction and special awareness among those in attendance along with preemptive, precautionary disinfecting practices by staff of the funeral home including constant surface cleaning in and around all public areas, bathrooms, register stands, doors (open doors for people), and possible

transportation vehicle such as limousines. Even how close you set your chairs is of high importance.

This is a virus transported through vapor droplets such as cough, sneezing, crying all of which are very much a part of funeral events.

- **Your facility or facilities you may use for funeral-related gatherings:** require heightened attention-door handles, all touched surfaces, furniture, bathrooms, prep room, garages, offices, kitchens-everything must be considered when implementing your exposure control plan if decided to have a limited public event.

An attitude of prudence and caution, while being considerate to the circumstances around the death and those affected by it, is the never-ending focus, but these circumstances require a modified approach. Yes, there will be difficult days and conversations ahead, but the attitude of open, honest dialogue will ensure reason will prevail and virus suppression will have an opportunity to take hold.

As previously stated, we all share a fundamental responsibility to act in a manner that is consistent with virus prevention and suppression. We must constantly ask ourselves, “are my actions aiding in and consistent with the expected, desired outcome or are my actions a hindrance to a positive outcome thereby assisting in the deterioration of this situation?”

Please stop and think about this for a moment. Knowing what we know and the recommendations that are being presented to us about minimizing large group assemblies, **IF** you and the family you are caring for decide to have a public funeral event and this event is found to have been a source point for expanding this virus, it is reasonably arguable that you and the family are acting in a manner of gross negligence and subject to the recourse for such. These are serious times and require serious actions by all.

During perilous periods in this nation’s history, our communities, our citizens, and the greater welfare of our country endured because of the rational, steadfast, undying fortitude of our American spirit. We are yet again at another pinnacle point in our country’s journey.

While we are passionate for our own personal causes, we must yield to commonsense and the greater public welfare in the application of our duties. While we did not cause this current situation to occur, we are all forced to face it today. The bright light is we have choice and opportunity in the solution.

As IFDA, we stand vigilant and committed to help you in any way we can to stay informed and prepared as this situation evolves in the coming weeks.