

WHAT IS COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Patients with COVID-19 have experienced mild to severe respiratory illness, including cough and shortness of breath. Other symptoms include congestion or runny nose, diarrhea, fatigue, fever over 100.4 degrees, headache, muscle or body aches, nausea, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat and vomiting. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus. It's not the same as other coronaviruses that commonly circulate among people and cause mild illness, such as the common cold. The risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases due to several underlying conditions and with age, with older adults at highest risk.

HOW DOES COVID-19 SPREAD?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through respiratory droplets when an infected person breathes, coughs, sings, sneezes or talks. These droplets can be inhaled into a healthy person's airways, lungs, mouth or nose and infect that person, especially when the two people are in within about 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or longer in a 24-hour period (called close contact). It's also important to know that not everyone who has COVID-19 shows symptoms.

That's why wearing a face mask is vital to helping stop the virus from spreading. It protects other people from infected droplets, and [it offers you some protection, too](#), according to recent studies.

Less common ways the virus spreads are airborne transmission in enclosed spaces with poor circulation and touching your mouth, nose or possibly eyes after contact with contaminated surfaces.

The best way to protect yourself and to help reduce the virus's spread is to limit your interactions with other people as much as possible and take precautions when you do interact with others. Those steps include wearing a face covering, maintaining social distance of 6 feet and good hand hygiene.

If you start feeling sick and think you may have COVID-19, get in touch with your healthcare provider within 24 hours.

LEVELS OF RISK FOR SPREADING COVID-19

General information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about the risk of COVID-19 spreading at gatherings and services is ranked below. You also can find specific information about Indiana's requirements [here](#) and in Gov. Eric J. Holcomb's [Executive Order 20-48](#). Please note that your local health department may be more restrictive.

Lowest risk: Virtual-only services and gatherings.

Lower risk: Smaller outdoor, in-person services and gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear cloth face coverings, come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city or county) and do not share objects.

Higher risk: Medium-sized in-person services and gatherings, either indoors or outdoors, adapted to let individuals remain at least 6 feet apart, with some individuals wearing face cloth coverings and some coming from outside the local area. Sharing of items or objects is limited.

Highest risk: Large in-person services and gatherings held indoors and where it's difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, few individuals wear cloth face coverings, and many people travel from outside the local area. Objects are shared.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 by following these guiding principles.

- The more people interact, the closer in distance the interaction is (less than 6 feet) and the longer the interaction lasts, the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- The [higher the level of community transmission](#) in an area, the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- [Masks](#) help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19, particularly if social distancing cannot be maintained.
- During an in-person gathering, convene outdoors or in well-ventilated areas, if possible, rather than poorly ventilated, indoor areas, to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19. Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings.
- Avoid sharing commonly used objects such as religious aids (e.g., religious books, collection plates, programs, etc.) to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Reduce the number of people engaged in activities like singing or chanting, as these behaviors can increase the amount of respiratory virus in the air.
- Increase hand hygiene and cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces and objects to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Practice [social distancing](#) by maintaining at least 6 feet between those attending; facility or lay staff; and clergy or officiants, especially when small, in-person services are held.
- Take extra precautions for those at [increased risk for COVID-19](#), particularly those who are older or have pre-existing conditions, to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.

ATTENDING FUNERALS

Funeral homes, crematories and morticians are essential providers and authorized to perform within their scope of duty to take charge and remove deceased persons from their places of death, prepare a deceased person for final disposition in any manner and make arrangements, provided that such arrangement comply with Indiana's [Back on Track](#) and social distancing guidelines.

Religious services, including funerals, will no longer be subject to limits on social gatherings. However, social distancing and other sanitation measures will continue to apply. Visitations or other gatherings before or after funerals remain subject to the limitations and restrictions for social gatherings.

In [some situations](#), many people have become sick with COVID-19 after attending a funeral service. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in communities, changes need to be made to funerals, visitations and memorials. This guidance provides strategies to protect you and others when you are grieving the loss of a loved one, supporting each other, making funeral arrangements and participating in funeral services and visitations. Some examples include:

- Using technology to connect virtually with family and friends during the grieving process
- Wearing [masks](#) while around others and outside of your home
- There is no limit for the number of individuals attending a funeral, but consider the following practices:
 - Ask all individuals who are 65 and above or who have an underlying at-risk health condition to stay home and watch services online.
 - Practice [social distancing](#) by maintaining at least 6 feet between attendees, facility staff, and clergy or officiants when small, in-person services are held.
 - Consider limiting the number of people engaged in activities that produce respiratory droplets, which may contain the COVID virus, (e.g., singing or chanting) especially when participants are indoors and near each other. If those attending choose to sing or chant, encourage them to wear cloth face coverings and increase distance between people to greater than 6 feet.
 - Space and mark seating, alternating fixed rows or extending the distance between movable seating when possible.
 - Space out seating for those who do not live in the same household to at least 6 feet apart between individuals and/or household groups.
 - Those who do not live in the same household should stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a mask when interacting with people who do not live in their household.
 - People who have been living in the same household can comfort each other in typical ways such as hugging, holding hands and sitting next to each other.
 - Place hand sanitizers in high-contact locations (e.g., bathroom, entries, exits) and ask staff, members and guests to sanitize their hands before entering the building.
 - See Gov. Holcomb's Executive Order [20-48](#), extending face covering requirements.
 - Consider placing signage that tells staff, members and guests not to enter if they are symptomatic or if they tested positive for COVID-19.
 - Avoid handing out materials.
 - People should nod, bow or wave instead of holding or shaking hands, hugging or kissing anyone who does not live in their household.
 - Avoid touching, hugging or kissing the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19 before and during body preparation, especially if you or a member of your household is at [higher risk](#) of severe illness from COVID-19. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after any contact with the body. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - All attending should follow [everyday preventive actions](#) to protect themselves and others from COVID-19, such as [washing hands](#) often and covering coughs and sneezes.

- Consider holding services and gatherings in a large, well-ventilated area or outdoors, as circumstances and traditions allow.
- Consider modified funeral arrangements, such as limiting attendance at funerals held shortly after the time of death to a small number of immediate family members and friends, then having additional memorial services when social distancing guidelines are less restrictive.
 - When you are deciding who should attend, consider how emotionally difficult social distancing practices might be for some people (such as keeping at least 6 feet apart and not hugging others who do not live in their household).
- Consider modifying funeral rites and rituals (for example, avoid touching the deceased person's body, personal belongings or other ceremonial objects) to make ensure everyone's safety.
- Gatherings following a funeral service should follow public gathering guidelines applicable to the opening stage of the county. More information on public gathering guidelines can be found on [here](#). Please note that your county may have opted to be more restrictive.
- While attending a funeral, follow proper hand hygiene protocols: wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water is not available; soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled; avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands; avoid close contact with people who are sick.

GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

Grief is a normal response to losing someone important to you. When a loved one dies, it is important for friends and family to be able to share stories and memories of the person and how they influenced their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the ability of friends and family to come together in person and grieve in typical ways. This is true regardless of whether the person's death was due to COVID-19 or some other cause.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, hosting gatherings now could be dangerous to those who would want to participate. Family and friends are finding alternate ways to connect, support each other and grieve after their loss. They understand the need to possibly plan for additional memorial services when COVID-19-related restrictions are lifted.

Take actions to help you cope with the loss of a loved one

Grief is a universal emotion, but no two people experience grief the same way. Some actions you can take to help you cope with feelings of grief while practicing social distancing and honoring your loved one include:

- Invite people to call you, or host conference calls with family members and friends to stay connected.
- Ask family and friends to share stories and pictures with you via phone, video chat, email, text message, photo sharing apps, social media or mailed letters.
- Create a virtual memory book, blog or webpage to remember your loved one, and ask family and friends to contribute their memories and stories.

- Coordinate a date and time for family and friends to honor your loved one by reciting a selected poem, spiritual reading or prayer from within their own households. Some cultures practice a prolonged mourning period with multiple observances, so hosting virtual events now and in-person events later may be preferred.
- Seek spiritual support from faith-based organizations, including religious leaders and congregations, if applicable. People who are not part of a faith tradition or religious community can seek support from other trusted community leaders and friends.
- Use grief counseling services, support groups or [hotlines](#), especially those that can be offered over the phone or online, or seek support from a mental healthcare provider.
- Read books about grief and loss. If you have children, read age-appropriate books with them and talk with them about how they are feeling.
- Take part in an activity that has significance to you and the loved one you have lost, such as planting flowers or a tree or preparing a favorite meal, in memory of your loved one.
- Review additional information from the CDC on loss and grief, plus [ways to cope with distress and anxiety](#).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the family and close friends of a person who died of COVID-19 may experience [stigma](#), such as people avoiding them or rejecting them. Stigma hurts everyone by creating fear or anger toward other people. Some people may avoid contact with you, your family members and friends when they would normally reach out to you. You can help stop stigma related to COVID-19 by [knowing the facts](#) and sharing them with extended family, friends and others in your community.

Visit [Be Well Indiana](#) for information and resources compiled by the Indiana Division of Mental Health and Addiction designed to help Hoosiers stay connected and maintain their well-being. These resources have been validated by local and national experts to ensure that you have access to reliable information you can trust.

PREVENTIVE ACTIONS FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS INVOLVING COVID-19

Funeral homes are authorized to meet with families to arrange for final disposition but should consider doing so by virtual or phone meetings if possible. If you need to meet in person, follow [everyday preventive actions](#) to protect yourself and others from COVID-19, such as wearing a [cloth face covering](#), [social distancing](#), [washing your hands often](#) and covering coughs and sneezes. Do not attend in-person meetings if you are sick or if you might have been exposed to COVID-19. Those with a [higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19](#) should weigh the benefits of in-person attendance against risk of exposure to a person with COVID-19, especially if recommendations for wearing cloth face coverings and social distancing may be difficult to follow for themselves or others.

A funeral or visitation services can be held with certain restrictions. Those who have COVID-19 or are exhibiting symptoms of it should be restricted from attending the funeral service or visitation to prevent its spread to others. Try to provide ways for family members or close friends to join the service remotely through use of available technology or offer to record the funeral service for later viewing.

In general, there is no need to delay funeral services and visitations due to COVID-19. However, some changes to

traditional practices are likely needed. Family members may need to discuss timing of services with funeral service providers, who may be overwhelmed.

Decedents with COVID-19 can be buried or cremated, but check for any additional state or local requirements that may dictate the handling and disposition of the remains of individuals who have died of certain infectious diseases. Guidelines for coroners are available [here](#).

Avoid touching the deceased person's body before preparation

There are many different cultural traditions involved in the bereavement process, including some that involve touching the deceased person's body before preparation. Though we are still learning more about how COVID-19 spreads, it may be possible that you could get COVID-19 by touching the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19 before the body is prepared for viewing. After the body has been prepared for viewing, there may be less of a chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging.

Take steps to protect yourself and loved ones, such as:

- Avoid touching, hugging or kissing the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19 before and during body preparation, especially if you or a member of your household is at [higher risk](#) of severe illness from COVID-19.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after any contact with the body. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Take precautions with rituals that involve touching the deceased person's body

If the deceased person had confirmed or suspected COVID-19, avoid kissing, washing or shrouding the body before, during and after the body has been prepared, if possible. Take precautions if participating in these activities is part of important religious or cultural practices. There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral service or visitation with the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19 after the body has been prepared for viewing.

- Discuss your cultural or religious traditions and the funeral wishes of the deceased, if applicable, with family members and the people you are working with (funeral home staff, clergy or officiants).
 - Identify any potential concerns and determine options to make changes to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Work with your cultural and faith leaders and funeral home staff to identify how to reduce exposure. Preserve traditional practices when it is possible to safely do so, and identify whether modified or new practices could satisfy the needs and values of the family and their loved one.
- People at [higher risk](#) of severe illness from COVID-19 and members of their household should not be involved in these activities.
- People conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves (nitrile, latex or rubber). Additional protective equipment may also be required, such as disposable and waterproof isolation gowns, face shields or goggles, and face masks (e.g., if splashing of fluids is expected).

- Following preparation of the body, [safely](#) remove gloves (and other protective equipment, if used) and throw them away. Immediately [wash your hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Shower as soon as possible.
- If you did not wear an isolation gown while preparing the body, wash your clothes in the warmest setting possible and dry them completely.
- If removing personal possessions (such as wedding rings) from the body or casket, clean and [disinfect](#) the items and wash hands right away.

Safely gather loved one's belongings

If desired, you may retrieve the belongings of a loved one who has died of COVID-19 outside their home (for example, in a hospital setting). Depending on local rules and regulations, family members may retrieve these belongings at the funeral home or the healthcare facility.

You should use gloves and practice good hand hygiene when handling loved ones' belongings. Depending on the type of belongings, such as electronics, you should also follow the [household item-specific cleaning and disinfection guidelines](#) when handling these items.

Holding funeral services and visitations

Familial and cultural expectations might put pressure on you and others to participate in or hold or schedule funeral services and visitations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, those expectations may need to be relaxed to protect the safety of those who would have participated. People continue to [get exposed to COVID-19 at funeral services](#); the people giving it to others were not feeling sick at the time and did not know they were carrying or spreading COVID-19.

Consider the following modifications to funeral services and visitations to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. These modifications are recommended for events held in any setting, including funeral homes, cemetery facilities, places of worship, private homes and other sites.

Limit those attending to a small number of immediate family and close friends

- Follow the guidelines, measures and restrictions from [Gov. Holcomb's](#) executive orders and from local officials, the [Indiana Department of Health](#) and [local health departments](#).
- Those who are sick, have a household member or other close contacts who are sick should not attend. Those who have [higher risk of severe illness](#) from COVID-19 should weigh the benefits of in-person attendance against the risk of exposure to a person with COVID-19, especially if recommendations for wearing masks and social distancing may be difficult to follow for themselves or others
- Consider limiting the number of people from different areas of the country or any areas with significant spread of COVID-19.
- Consider offering other ways for family and friends to participate, such as by phone or online (live or recorded).

Consider changing traditional rituals or practices

Discuss with the clergy member or officiant, and the family, any potential changes that might be necessary to protect all participants and those attending. Consider options for modified or new practices that would be acceptable to the family and friends, such as:

- Holding a graveside-only service.
- Changing or removing funeral practices that involve close contact or sharing things among members of different households, such as:
 - Sharing a car or limousine ride between the church and cemetery.
 - Providing food and beverages for those attending after the service.
- Changing rituals in consultation with clergy and other faith leaders.

Share with the people you are working with (clergy, family or officiant) resources you may be able to provide, such as:

- Virtual funeral services, visitations and memorial tributes by online video streaming or recorded video. Consider potential issues with access to technology and high-speed internet for those virtually attending, as well as how any technological difficulties during the service could affect the event.
- Online guestbooks or memory books that invite people to share stories, notes of condolence or photos.
- Assistance with sharing details about the plan for funeral services and visitations with extended family and friends, including how to compassionately communicate the necessary reasons for any changes to traditional practices.

If some traditions, such as certain religious rituals, sharing rides to the gravesite, or having food and beverages, are considered essential to the family and friends, consider modifying them.

- Limit sharing or passing of items, such as worship aids and prayer books, by clergy and those attending during religious rituals.
- Group household members together inside the vehicle. Avoid having non-household members sharing vehicles to travel between locations during the services; if necessary, increase ventilation by opening windows or using the air conditioner on nonrecirculating mode.
- If food is offered at a reception, have individual prepackaged boxes or bags instead of a potluck, buffet or family style meal. Avoid sharing foods and utensils.

In some cultures, bringing food or gifts to grieving family members is an important way to express care and concern. During the COVID-19 pandemic, consider expressing care in ways that do not involve personal interactions. Consider delivering food or gifts to grieving family members in ways that keep people at least 6 feet apart, mailing care packages or giving people gift cards for food delivery services.

PREVENTIVE ACTIONS FOR FUNERAL HOME WORKERS HANDLING DECEDENTS

Funeral home workers may potentially be exposed to the COVID-19 virus if they are entering homes or other locations. They may not know if a person has died from COVID-19 or if other people at the same location have COVID-19. Unless funeral home workers know that they will not be exposed to COVID-19 when traveling to handle a decedent, it's recommended that they follow standard precautions and use personal protective equipment (PPE) recommended for emergency medical service employees.

Funeral home workers should follow these routine infection prevention and control precautions when handling a decedent who died of COVID-19:

- Follow [standard precautions](#) when transferring a body to a bag, including PPE if splashing of fluids is expected.
- Disinfect the outside of the bag with a product on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [List N: Disinfectants for Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method, contact time, etc.).
- Wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling the body bag.
- Body bags and removal pouches should be properly disposed of after they are used unless manufacturer's instructions allow for reuse after proper cleaning and disinfection.
- During embalming, follow standard precautions including the use of additional PPE if splashing is expected (e.g. disposable gown, face shield or goggles and N95 respirator).
- Wear appropriate respiratory protection if any procedures will generate aerosols or if required for chemicals used in accordance with the manufacturer's label.
- Wear heavy-duty gloves over nitrile disposable gloves if there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds or other injuries that break the skin.
- Additional information on how to safely conduct aerosol-generating procedures is in the [CDC's Postmortem Guidance](#).

Cleaning should be conducted in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Use EPA-approved disinfectants on the List N: Disinfectants for Coronavirus (COVID-19), or with a human coronavirus claim. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method, contact time, etc.).

After cleaning and removal of PPE, perform [hand hygiene](#) by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. Soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly dirty.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information and resources for COVID-19 are available below.

- Funeral Home Workers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/funeral-faqs.html>
- Indiana Department of Health COVID-19 webpage: <https://coronavirus.in.gov/>
- CDC COVID-19 webpage: <http://cdc.gov/coronavirus>



- Guidance about a family member dying overseas [from COVID-19](#)
- If the deceased person had confirmed or suspected COVID-19, follow CDC guidelines [to clean and disinfect the home](#) and any items that will be removed from it

If you, or someone you care about, is feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others:

- Call 911
- Visit the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#), call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- Visit the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) or call 1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224
- Contact the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#), call 1-800-273- 8255 or use the online [Lifeline Crisis Chat](#)
- [Be Well Indiana Crisis Hotline](#): Call: 211, enter your ZIP code and press 3