

### 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 fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel (new) coronavirus. It is not the same as other types of coronaviruses that commonly circulate among people and cause mild illness, like the common cold. The risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age, with older adults at highest risk.

### HOW DOES COVID-19 SPREAD?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet for 15 minutes or longer) through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. The best way to protect yourself and to help reduce the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 is to limit your interactions with other people as much as possible and take precautions to prevent getting COVID-19 when you do interact with others. Those steps include wearing a face covering, maintaining social distance of 6 feet and washing your hands frequently. If you start feeling sick and think you may have COVID-19, get in touch with your healthcare provider within 24 hours.

### 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, may continue and 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.

- If possible, venues should make accommodations for remote attendance for others. Individuals who are at high risk for COVID-19 are strongly encouraged to attend remotely.
- 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
  - Ensure 6 feet between individuals or family units of the same households during services
  - Space and mark seating, alternating fixed rows or extending the distance between movable seating when possible

- Place hand sanitizers in high-contact locations (e.g. bathroom, entry, exit) and ask staff, members and guests to sanitize their hands before entering the building
- Recommend putting on a face covering before entering the building
- Consider placing signage telling staff, members and guests to not enter if they are symptomatic or if they tested positive for COVID-19
- Avoid handing out materials
- 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 are 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.
- Gatherings following a funeral service should follow public gathering applicable to the opening stage of the county. More information on public gathering guidelines can be found on <https://BackOnTrack.in.gov/>. 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.

### PREVENTIVE ACTIONS FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS INVOLVING COVID-19

Funeral homes are authorized to meet with families to make arrangements for final disposition but should do so by telephone or remotely if possible. If funeral homes must meet with families, they should practice social distancing consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [guidelines](#).

A funeral or visitation services can be held with certain restrictions. Persons who have COVID-19 or are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should be restricted from attending the funeral service or visitation to prevent its spread to others who are attending. 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.

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](#).

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.

- Work with your cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff to identify how to reduce exposure.
- 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 facemasks (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.

### 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 persons at the same location have COVID-19. Unless the funeral home worker knows that they will not be exposed to COVID-19 when traveling to handle a decedent, it is recommended that they follow standard precautions and use PPE that has been recommended for emergency medical service employees.

Funeral home workers should follow 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 [EPA's List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- Wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling the body bag.
- Body bags and removal pouches should be properly disposed 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 Use Against SARS-CoV-2, or with a human coronavirus claim. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and 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 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.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

- Funeral Guidance for Individuals and Families: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/funeral-guidance.html>
- Funeral Home Workers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/funeral-faqs.html>
- ISDH COVID-19 webpage: <https://coronavirus.in.gov/>
- CDC COVID-19 webpage: <http://cdc.gov/coronavirus>