

Funerals: COVID-19 Guidance

As of 28 September 2020

The Government has updated its guidance for Places of Worship. This is to ensure that social interaction is limited in order to reduce the risk of viral transmission.

The government's guidelines regarding funerals have been updated too. Changes include:

- allowing both family and friends to attend a funeral
- the number of people who can attend a funeral
- allowing mourners to stay overnight outside their home
- the safe management of the funeral venue
- the change in requirement to self-isolate for 10 days (previously seven) for those with symptoms of COVID-19
- **the requirement to wear face coverings in indoor places of worship, crematoria and burial ground chapels**

For more, read the full government guidelines on '[Managing a Funeral During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)'.

The Guidance offered by the Bishops' Conference for the [Celebration of Mass](#) should also be observed as Requiem Masses as well as Funeral Services can now be celebrated.

Priests should remain mindful of their own personal situation with respect to potential exposure to virus transmission. See the Guidance for the Celebration of Mass document for additional details.

Funerals

The Government guidance limits the number of people permitted to attend funerals to 30 people.

Parishes are encouraged to live-stream Funeral Services and Requiem Masses so that those who cannot attend may unite themselves to the worship in Church and pray for the deceased and the consolation of the mourners.

Before the Service

There should be good collaboration between the family of the deceased, the funeral director and the clergy to ensure that the numbers of people assembling in the church is limited to the immediate family and those very close to the deceased.

Any interaction with the family should be done safely – this may mean by telephone, Skype, Zoom etc.

It is important to consider the following issues before the service:

Who can attend?

As a principle, numbers should be minimised as far as possible and no more than 30 people.

Alongside the member of clergy, Funeral Director and staff, the government advises that only the following should attend:

- members of the person's household
- close family members
- or if the above are unable to attend, close friends

It is important that anyone attending should not exhibit any symptoms of COVID-19 or place themselves at risk. [See the Government guidance](#).

The usual guidance on hygiene, hand sanitising and people with symptoms not attending church applies at this time.

Preparing the Church for the service

Hand sanitisers should be signposted, readily available and easily accessible. Notices should be clearly placed advising people of correct hygiene practices. Consideration should be given as to the flow of groups in and out of the church to minimise any risk of compromising physical distancing, avoiding overlap between different groups while also leaving time for adequate cleaning. The Church should be well ventilated, preferably by opening windows and doors where possible.

If a Requiem Mass is to be celebrated, then the preparations should follow the Guidance for the Celebration of Mass in terms of preparing the credence table and elements for Holy Communion.

Safeguarding the Priest/Deacon/Minister from infection

Clergy should remain mindful of their own personal hygiene, sanitising/washing their hands before and after the service and again after the committal. Physical contact with mourners and the coffin containing the body is to be avoided.

Physical contact

While it is contrary to human instinct and normal pastoral practice, it is important to advise mourners that there should be no physical contact including shaking hands, hugging or kissing outside their own households.

Reception of Remains

The coffin should be brought into the church on a trolley, supplied by the Funeral Directors, and should be manoeuvred by them alone. There should be no placing of a funeral pall over the coffin or the Christian symbols, flowers or other objects. These may be placed near the coffin by the minister.

During the Service

At this time, there should be no singing.⁵ Single-use service sheets can be provided which the participants should take with them as they leave the church. In light of the Government advice, additional people are not encouraged to attend the service.

If the family are to participate in the Liturgy of the Word, then they should use hand sanitiser before and after reading from the Lectern or be provided with single use gloves. They should avoid unnecessary contact with any microphone or the prepared Lectionary or the book containing the Prayer of the Faithful. Portable microphones should not be used or passed from hand to hand.

If there is a Requiem Mass, it is important for the celebrant to explain to the congregation the mode of receiving communion. He should be assisted by the stewards to direct people safely to receive Holy Communion at the appropriate

time. Care should be taken by those moving around the church at this time, especially in the proximity of the coffin.

Incense should not be used at funerals as this can promote coughing in people which increases the risk of viral transmission. If the celebrant uses Holy Water as part of the reception of the coffin or final commendation, he should take care that it is not splashed onto the congregation or those near the coffin.

From government guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic:

Where rituals or ceremonies require water to be applied to the body, small volumes can be splashed onto the body, but full immersion should be avoided. Others present should move out of range of any potential splashing.

After the Service

The church should be closed after the funeral has finished in order to clean the space according to the Bishops' Conference guidelines on individual prayer. Those cleaning afterwards should wear appropriate equipment (gloves/apron) as set out in the guidance on opening churches for individual prayer.

If there is cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of clerical vestments, these should be washed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, using the warmest water setting allowed for the fabric and allowing time for them to dry completely.

The Committal

The management of people at the place of committal comes under the local regulations of the cemetery or the crematorium, and these should be observed.