



Department of Health

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HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

SALLY DRESLIN, M.S., R.N.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

March 18, 2020

DAL: BFD 20-01
Subject: COVID-19 Guidance for Funeral
Directors

Dear Funeral Director:

In response to multiple inquiries from the funeral directing industry throughout the State, the Department of Health (the Department) Bureau of Funeral Directing is distributing the following guidance in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Guidance for funeral firms and families planning funerals has been issued by the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC). This guidance is available online at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#funerals>. Some of the highlights of this guidance are:

- There is currently no known risk(s) associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died from COVID-19. However, individuals who are close contacts of the decedent may themselves be infected with or incubating the virus, and should not attend as they may infect others. Furthermore, any person who is experiencing a fever, cough or other symptom or has any health condition which could put them at risk should not attend services or calling hours.
- People should consider not touching the body of someone who has died as a result of COVID-19. Older people and people of all ages with severe underlying health conditions are at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness. There may be less chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging after the body has been prepared for viewing. Other activities, such as kissing, washing, and shrouding should be avoided before, during, and after the body has been prepared. If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible.
- Funeral home workers should follow their routine infection prevention and control precautions when handling a decedent who died of COVID-19. If it is necessary to transfer a body to a bag, follow [Standard Precautions](#), including additional personal protective equipment (PPE) if splashing of fluids is expected. For transporting a body after the body has been bagged, disinfect the outside of the bag with a with an [EPA-](#)

approved product expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses.

Additionally, the Department has issued guidelines regarding the size of public gatherings. This information is subject to ongoing updates and should be frequently checked. It is currently recommended that gatherings be avoided, and in all cases limited to no more than fifty percent of the maximum capacity of the funeral home or 50 individuals, whichever is lower, which includes a wake, memorial service or other gathering.

As new guidance and information becomes available the most current information will be posted on the Department's Novel Coronavirus website at <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

If you have any questions, please contact the Bureau of Funeral direction by telephone at 518-402-0785 or by email at funeral.health.ny.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas W. Fuller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thomas" being the most prominent.

Thomas W. Fuller, Director
Bureau of Funeral Directing