

# Situation Update: Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## CDC Releases Practical COVID-19 Guidance for Funeral Directors

NFDA continues to lead the conversation with federal officials about the role of funeral service as it relates to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) situation. At the request of NFDA and as a follow up to the postmortem guidance released by the CDC in late-February, today, the agency released specific information about funeral and visitation services to help funeral directors safely care for people who have died of confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

Specifically, this answers the following questions:

- Am I at risk if I go to a funeral or visitation service for someone who died of COVID-19?
- Am I at risk if I touch someone who died of COVID-19 after they have passed away?
- What do funeral home workers need to know about handling decedents who had COVID-19?
- What should I do if my family member died from COVID-19 while overseas and what are the requirements for returning the body to the U.S.?

### **In summary:**

- **You can still have a funeral or visitation.**
- **Bodies can be embalmed using proper PPE.**
- **Decedents can be buried or cremated but check with state and local requirements.**

We urge you to [review this critical information](#) immediately and share it with your staff.

This is the most up-to-date information that we have. From the very beginning of this situation, NFDA has been receiving information from the CDC, Department of Health and Human Services and other agencies about the evolution of COVID-19 in the United States. As we receive new information, we are sharing it with you and will continue to do so as long as necessary. Our COVID-19 information page can be found at [www.nfda.org/covid-19](http://www.nfda.org/covid-19).

## **Embalming**

According to the CDC, bodies of those who die of confirmed or suspected COVID-19 can safely be transported and embalmed. The [new guidance](#) for funeral home staff emphasizes:

- Transporting bodies in a body bag and disinfecting the bag with a product that contains [EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#).
- The guidance offers PPE recommendations for transfers and embalming, depending on the circumstances funeral home personnel expect to encounter. It is always better to don more PPE and be safe than sorry. All PPE should be [doffed](#) (taken off) and disposed of properly.
  - Additional guidance on PPE can be found [on the CDC website](#).
- Disinfecting contaminated surfaces using [products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#) is of utmost importance.

The guidance also notes that 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. At a minimum, people conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required (such as disposable gown, face shield or goggles and facemask).”*

There has been concern expressed about the availability of PPE. NFDA is aware this may be a challenge and we are in touch with government officials about ensuring funeral home staff are on the priority list for receiving critical supplies.

The CDC’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) – phone: **770-488-7100** – is available for urgent consultation should you need additional guidance regarding a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19.

## Cremation or Burial

At this time, the CDC states that decedents with COVID-19 may be buried or cremated according to the family's preferences. However, you should *“check for any additional state and local requirements that may dictate the handling and disposition of the remains of individuals who have died of certain infectious diseases.”*

## Visitations and Funerals

At this time, CDC guidance states, *“There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19.”* However, the CDC also notes, *“People should consider not touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19.”*

As with any gathering or event, you should check with local health officials to determine whether there are any prohibitions on holding public events, such as a visitation or funeral. As an extra layer of precaution for you, your staff and those you serve, you may want to consider other measures such as:

- Remind families about how to [prevent the spread of COVID-19](#), such as by staying home if you are sick, washing your hands, and covering coughs and sneezes. The CDC has great [informational flyers](#), such as “How to Stop The Spread of Germs,” you can post in your funeral home or hand out to families.
- Keep soap dispensers filled in public (and employee) restrooms.
  - The CDC has several [informational flyers on handwashing](#) you can post in public and staff restrooms.
- Offer alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to guests (and employees).
- Have extra tissues on hand.
- If, for some reason, an individual is unable to attend a service, discuss options with the family:
  - Can the service be webcast using either a webcasting service or Facebook Live?
  - Can the service be postponed?
  - Can the family hold a memorial gathering – either in addition to or in lieu of a funeral service – at a later date?

As a business open to the public, it's important that you and your staff be vigilant about cleaning, especially after services or arrangement conferences. The CDC offers [guidance for businesses](#) – including recommendations on cleaning products – on cleaning facilities open to the public.

## Funeral Home Owners

As a funeral home owner, it is your responsibility to protect the health and safety of your staff. We urge you to carefully review this [funeral home-specific guidance](#) as well as:

- [CDC Resources for Businesses and Employers](#).
- Information from OSHA about employer obligations during the COVID-19 situation: [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#) and [OSHA's COVID-19 Information Page](#).
- An [FAQ on COVID-19](#) prepared by SESCO Management Consultants, NFDA's endorsed human resources consultants.
  - NFDA members are also entitled to free advice via [NFDA's Human Resources Hotline](#), 800-764-4127 or [sesco@sescomgt.com](mailto:sesco@sescomgt.com).
- The [Department of Labor's information](#) regarding COVID-19-related issues.

We encourage you to prepare a plan of action for your business and then meet with all full- and part-time staff – from funeral directors to administrative assistants to maintenance staff – to ensure everyone is aware of the role they can plan in keeping themselves, their co-workers and client families safe. As new information comes up, share it with all staff.

In addition to discussing your plan of action with staff, also be in communication with other third-parties you may work with such as florists, caterers, removal services, etc.

NFDA cares deeply about the health and safety of you and those you serve. We pledge to do all we can to keep everyone informed of the latest information. Watch the NFDA website, your email and NFDA's social media accounts for updates as they become available. Our COVID-19 information page can be found at [www.nfda.org/covid-19](http://www.nfda.org/covid-19).