

COVID-19 OFFICIAL GUIDELINES FOR DEATHS & FUNERALS

High Level Key Messages for Ethnic Communities

Recently the Government announced new rules to how we will now need to report and take care of our deceased loved ones during lockdown in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our communities have had to make many changes to our cultural and faith practices to keep people and communities safe from COVID-19. This now extends to funerals and burials of our loved ones who pass away during lockdown.

There are strict rules in place for when loved ones pass away, regardless of the cause. These rules apply to everyone, every culture, every religion.

What this now means:

- no formal funerals whatsoever and only very limited attendance allowed at burials or cremations
- no funerals nor prayer meetings at churches, mosques, synagogues, temple, gurdwara, nor marae
- no private funerals at home

Why?

Because COVID-19 is now in the community and public gatherings put your family and friends at risk, especially our elderly and those with vulnerable health conditions.

What are your options:

- Immediate burial or cremation of your loved one, depending on your religious/cultural needs
- If cremation, please note there may be a delayed receipt of burial of ashes until we are well out of Alert 3 and Alert 4

These are tough rules which many will find hard, but we cannot risk the health and safety of our family and friends. These rules will reduce the spread of COVID-19.

These rules/guidelines will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are responsive to the changing COVID-19 environment in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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When someone dies – what we need to do first

1. Appoint a family member or Spokesperson

Appoint a family member to contact and liaise with Funeral Director, GP/Doctor, and Police.

You can also appoint a community member to speak on your behalf (a spokesperson) if you are not coping and/or struggle with English.

The spokesperson cannot come to your house if they are in a different bubble. The spokesperson will need to do this by phone for you.

2. Contact the deceased's Health Provider (Doctor/GP or Medical Practice).

- If your loved one has died from a known health issue, this will be critical information for the Funeral Director – your loved one's Health Provider must liaise directly with the Funeral Director (once appointed) to pass on this information.
- If your loved one has died from COVID-19, your Health Provider will support you with information on what to do next. Further information can also be found [here](#)
- If your loved one has died from an unknown cause, a post-mortem will need to be undertaken. Your Health Provider will assist you in the first instance and the Police may be contacted. They will liaise directly with your appointed family member or spokesperson.

3. Get in touch with a local Funeral Director

A funeral director will help you organise arrangements for burial cremation – as set out above.

If you are unsure about how or who to contact to find a Funeral Director, please work with your Health Provider, or the Police to identify someone suitable.

[Local Funeral Directors can also be found through the Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand \(FDANZ\).](#)

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Be prepared for the following to happen

Once you have found a funeral director, be prepared for the following:

- **If the Funeral Director encounters high levels of anxiety, distress or confrontational behaviour, they will contact the local Police for assistance.**
- **They will uplift your loved one wearing full protective clothing** including masks, gloves, protective clothing – **this may be upsetting for family, especially young ones.**
- **They will only allow one appointed family member or spokesperson to facilitate arrangements including paperwork – this may need to be done remotely or at least using new social distancing measures of 2 metres.**
- **Only the family who have been in the same isolation bubble as the deceased will be allowed to go to the funeral home for viewing and prayers. There should not be physical contact with the deceased body including washing and/or touching the body or the casket.**
- All Funeral Directors are being encouraged to **carry out burials and cremations as quickly as possible.**
- **Family who have been in the same isolation bubble as the deceased may go to the cemetery or crematorium for the burial.** It is important that they have their own transport within their isolation bubble (that is, nobody from another bubble can drive them or attend the burial).
- **Importantly, the above option only applies within the region** the person has passed away in. The deceased can not be transported outside the region where they died.
- **Families may wish to wait until after we have left Alert Level 4 to have a funeral or cremation for their loved one, allowing more people to attend.** Some regions have facilities where bodies can be kept (refrigerated). You may wish to discuss this option with your funeral director.

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TO NOTE:

The body of a deceased loved one is potentially contagious

- Where possible, try to minimise contact with the deceased loved-one to prevent COVID-19 spread.
- It will be very hard, but do not allow any others to touch the deceased or those who are in isolation with them.
- No family or friends will be able to visit your home or the funeral home to pay their respects.
- Time available with your deceased loved-one will be short.

If your loved one passes away in hospital

- You may be able to view them at a safe distance before and after their death, but only if the hospital is still allowing access to their buildings. Remote viewing may be available via technology.
- You will not be permitted to touch, wash and/or dress your loved one's body.
- The hospital will transfer your loved one to its mortuary, and then into the care of your appointed Funeral Director.
- Only family who have been in the same isolation bubble as the deceased will be allowed to go to the funeral home for viewing and or prayers from a distance.
- Funeral Directors may have restrictions in place depending on their own health and safety policies and protocols. They will let you know what these are and you will be required to respect these.

If your loved one passes away at home

- Family touching, washing and/or dressing your loved one's body poses a significant health risk and is strongly advised against.
- The Funeral Director will transfer your loved one to their facilities and prepare them.

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If your loved one passes away overseas

- Cremation will almost certainly have to occur, as repatriation is likely to be impossible.
- Your loved one's ashes may be repatriated at a later time when border controls return to normal.

Travel to the funeral home/cemetery

- Only family who have been in the same isolation bubble as the deceased will be allowed to go to the funeral home.
- Only family who have been in the same isolation bubble as the deceased may go to the cemetery or crematorium for the burial. It is important that they have their own transport within their isolation bubble (i.e. nobody from another bubble can drive them or attend the burial).
- Strict travel restrictions are still in place. Family who are travelling must use their own vehicles, or travel using an authorised essential transport service only.
- As soon as the burial is complete, or as soon as family have received their loved one's ashes, they must return home directly without taking detours.

Protecting everyone in your isolation bubble

- Any family member who is unwell, even mildly so, must remain home.
- People at higher risk must also stay home. This includes those over 70 years of age, pregnant women, family who are immune-compromised, have cancer or pre-existing conditions like cardiovascular disease, respiratory issues, kidney problems, diabetes, or high blood pressure.

If cremation for your loved one is required

- Although you may not be used to cremation it may have to be an option you consider, especially if you are wanting to return your loved one to their family once we recover.
- Be prepared that you may not receive your loved-one's ashes until after the pandemic.

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Role of Funeral Directors

- All Funeral Directors have agreed to follow a strict set of guidelines and will abide by these.
- Funeral Directors will liaise with local Councils to ensure that any local authority rules are followed.
- Funeral Directors may have other restrictions in place depending on their own health and safety policies and protocols. They will let you know what these are, and you will be required to respect these.

Honouring your loved one

- Family who have been in the same isolation bubble as the deceased may briefly conduct prayers and cultural acknowledgements at both the funeral home and cemetery.
- You may also choose to livestream or record this service to pass onto wider family and friends.
- Once we recover from this pandemic, your family may want to come together to honour your loved one. If your family member was cremated, you may want to more formally consecrate their ashes. If they were buried immediately, you may choose to hold a full service at the burial grounds. These are only some of the ways you may choose to remember your lost loved one.

Getting support

- We encourage families to utilise the services of their Police Liaison Officers, local community leader, and their deceased loved-one's Health Providers.
- Grieving is never easy. If you feel you are not coping, it is important to talk with a health professional. For support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing, you can call or text 1737 – free, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – to talk with a trained counsellor.
- For more information on how Funeral Directors are managing their operations during the Covid-19 pandemic situation, and options for Funeral Directors see: [Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand \(FDANZ\)](#).

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