

**Guidance for Clergy/Families for Funerals, Memorials,
Vigils, and Funeral Homes**

March 17, 2020

To stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), Mayor Muriel Bowser issued Mayor's Order: Prohibition on Mass Gatherings during Public Health Emergency – coronavirus (COVID-19). Below is guidance for funerals, memorials, vigils, and funeral homes until further notice.

Deaths Due to Any Cause:

Families and clergy should limit the amount of people gathered for funeral, memorial, and vigil services to less than the posted guidelines issued by the DC Department of Health (DC Health), with social distancing best practices implemented to reduce the spread of COVID-19. For example, distance chairs at least six feet apart, create six feet of distance between each other while sitting in a pew, and avoid handshakes and hugging.

Deaths Due to COVID-19:

Mortuary and funeral home workers should always follow existing guidelines for safe work practices (e.g. biosafety guidance). When handling human remains with known or suspected COVID-19 infection, workers must be protected from exposure to infected blood and body fluids or to contaminated objects and surfaces.

Workers should use **standard precautions** to ensure protection from body fluids splashing or contaminating eyes, mouth, nose, hands or clothing. At a minimum, mortuary workers should:

- Wear latex or nitrile, nonsterile gloves when handling potentially infectious materials.
- Wear heavy-duty gloves over the latex/nitrile gloves if there is a risk of cuts, puncture wounds or other injuries that break the skin.
- Wear a clean, long-sleeved fluid-resistant or impermeable gown to protect the clothing.
- Use a plastic face shield or a surgical mask and goggles to protect the face, eyes, nose and mouth from potentially infectious body fluids if there is a risk of splashing. If there is a risk of aerosol generation while handling human remains, use respiratory protection as specified.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), embalming is allowed. For deaths due to COVID-19, families and viewers should have at least six feet between them and the casket to avoid touching the body.

For more information and resources on the District's COVID-19 response, visit coronavirus.dc.gov.

Additional Resources

- For the latest interim guidance from the CDC for Funerals, visit: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html
- CDC Interim Guidance for Collection and Submission of Postmortem Specimens from Deceased Persons Under Investigation (PUI) for COVID-19: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-postmortem-specimens.html#autopsy