

Bereavement

Information for the Family, Friends and Carers of a Deceased Person who is COVID-19 Positive

We wish to extend our sincere sympathy to you on your bereavement.

We understand that at this difficult time you are likely to be involved in arranging and attending funeral services for the deceased person; unfortunately because of the current COVID-19 situation there are some changes to the usual procedures that we have tried to describe and explain briefly in this leaflet.

Our Staff and your Funeral Director will be aware of these new guidelines and will assist you in making appropriate arrangements while protecting yourself and others at this difficult time.

The Risks

The virus that causes the COVID-19 illness spreads from person to person through droplets expelled from the nose or mouth of a person with the virus when they cough or sneeze.

▪ **The Deceased Person**

When the body of a person who is recently deceased is moved there is a risk that a small amount of air and droplets can be expelled from the lungs and airways of the deceased person. When that deceased person has had COVID-19 there is a risk that those expelled droplets may transmit the virus to those who touch the person, the surroundings and objects close to the deceased patient.

▪ **Persons Attending the Funeral Home and /or Funeral Services**

For the most part the risks to persons who wish to spend time with the deceased person or attend the funeral services have to do with the public health advice that recommends avoiding close contact with other persons. When attending the funeral/service you should wash your hands regularly and cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or the bend of your elbow when you cough or sneeze.

Additional risks exist where you or other persons attending any planned ceremonies have been informed by Public Health that **they are 'COVID-19 close contacts'** because you may have been infected and could potentially spread the virus.

Because of these risks you are advised to follow these recommendations:

Do's:

- Take the deceased person's belongings home from the Hospital in a bag (provided) but if possible do not open the bag or touch the items for 48 hours. If you need to retrieve items before that time, wash your hands or use alcohol hand rub thereafter.
- Contact your Funeral Director as quickly as possible as they will be able to help you with whatever ceremonies you decide you would like to have. The arrangements could include:
 - A few close family/friends may be able to attend the funeral home.
 - You can opt for a burial or a cremation of the remains.
 - You might consider holding a Memorial Service or funeral at a later date.
- The funeral should be private and limited to those that the family/friends identify as essential.
- The coffin will need to remain closed.
- Physical distancing of at least 1meter, but ideally 2meters between groups is recommended.
- Use your own private transport to travel to and from the venue.

Don'ts:

- It is advised that you do not touch or kiss the deceased person or any surfaces or objects close to them.
- At this time a Wake in the home cannot take place because of the restrictions on social gatherings and potential infection risk.
- Direct contact between groups is not advised and there should be no shaking of hands to express sympathy.
- It is advised not to use condolence books and the recommendation is for people to issue condolences through social media, online websites such as rip.ie, text or by letter.

Information Source: Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) Guidance (2020) [National Interim Guidelines for Funeral Directors on managing infection risks when handling deceased individuals with confirmed COVID-19](#) This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about COVID-19 and is intended as a guide only. In this rapidly evolving situation the guidance may change (Version 1.3; 12.03.2020).

Bettina Korn, End of Life Care Coordinator, St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8