

COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Alternate Funeral Arrangements

Background

- Health protection guidance aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic such as social distancing, cloth face coverings, and limited gatherings have affected traditional funeral arrangements. This document provides best practices for organizing alternative funeral arrangements for loved ones.
- The following is a list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing COVID-19 operations across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute nor should be considered as guidance in any way.

Key Considerations

- Alternative funeral arrangements should follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [health protection guidance](#), while also respecting religious and cultural beliefs and allowing people to mourn the death of a loved one.
- Webcasting or livestreaming a funeral allows those who cannot be physically present at a service to still partake in the event.

Lessons Learned Related to COVID-19 Operations for Alternative Funeral Arrangements

Conducting Services in Nontraditional Ways

- **Potential Best Practice:** Funeral directors are encouraging outside, graveside funerals. If funerals are held indoors, funeral homes are removing chairs to adhere to social distancing measures and conducting extra cleaning in all public and private areas.¹

¹ 2020 Shiva, COVID-19 Coronavirus – Social Distancing and Jewish Mourning, <https://www.shiva.com/learning-center/visiting-shiva/covid-19-coronavirus-social-distancing-and-jewish-mourning-shiva/>.



FEMA

- **Potential Best Practice:** Spain² is holding drive-through funerals in Madrid. The driver opens the rear door of the hearse, five or fewer people stand behind the hearse while the priest says a blessing, then the sealed casket is removed.³
- **Potential Best Practice:** Scheduled visitation times is an element of a funeral that can limit crowds in the funeral home, while allowing family and friends to pay tribute to a loved one who has died.⁴
- **Potential Best Practices:** Individuals can attend funerals from inside their cars, and step out of the cars one-by-one to pay their final respects. Touching the body is discouraged due to contamination risks.⁵
- **Potential Best Practice:** Many places of worship are conducting gravesite services and schedule a memorial service at a later date.⁶

Technological Resources

- **Potential Best Practice:** The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) offers a webcasting license that covers services broadcast via funeral webcasting software, as well as other livestreaming platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, Vimeo, and Skype. The license also covers the copyrighted music in the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) and Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC) catalogs.⁷
- **Potential Best Practice:** Funeral directors are using digital programs to complete and sign official documents, and teleconferencing to initiate and complete arrangements over the phone to reduce in person consultation time.⁸
- **Potential Best Practice:** A funeral service held in South Carolina used a portable sound system to transmit the service to relatives sitting in their vehicles.⁹

² This document contains references and links to non-federal resources and organizations. This information is meant solely for informational purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the U.S. government.

³ 2020 CNN, Drive-through funerals are being held in the epicenter of Spain's coronavirus pandemic,

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/06/europe/spain-coronavirus-drive-thru-funerals-madrid-intl/index.html>

⁴ 2020 NFDA, Coronavirus Resources FAQs, <https://www.nfda.org/coronavirus-resources>

⁵ 2020 NBC News, 'Awful and beautiful': Saying goodbye to coronavirus victims without a funeral,

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/awful-beautiful-saying-goodbye-coronavirus-victims-without-funeral-n1175431>

⁶ 2020 NWI Times, E-funeral safe alternative for family in wake of COVID-19 outbreak,

https://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/e-funeral-safe-alternative-for-family-in-wake-of-covid/article_f6cb2c0f-3338-59d4-9ca1-64ce15e8beb9.html

⁷ 2020 NFDA, Covid-19 Visitations and Funerals, <https://nfda.org/covid-19/visitations-funerals>

⁸ 2020 USA Today, Burials without funerals, grief without hugs: Coronavirus is changing how we say goodbye,

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/04/02/funerals-during-coronavirus-pandemic-no-hugs-big-gatherings/5102855002/>

⁹ 2020 Greenville News, Coronavirus causing confusing, creating challenges for South Carolina funeral homes,

<https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/2020/04/06/coronavirus-sc-funeral-homes-deal-challenges-amid-pandemic/2944088001/>

- **Potential Best Practice:** Funeral Directors are offering personalized virtual funerals or ceremonies with online streaming of services to facilitate virtual end-of-life events to bridge the gap between private limited services and individuals wishing to attend.¹⁰
- **Potential Best Practice:** Using video conferencing software allows numerous individuals to participate, and allows family and friends to share stories virtually.¹¹

Potential Best Practice: Funeral directors are encouraging the use of online guestbooks for condolence messages to the family.¹²

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cjpsupport@fema.dhs.gov.

¹⁰ 2020 Springfield News-Sun, Coronavirus: Springfield funeral homes give families alternative to traditional services, <https://www.springfieldnewssun.com/news/local/coronavirus-springfield-funeral-homes-give-families-alternatives-traditional-services/f7LGUoMpfGWEOfxtGqkhzM/>

¹¹ 2020 LAist, Funerals Must Change In This Time Of Social Distancing, <https://laist.com/2020/03/31/funerals-change-social-distancing-covid-19-coronavirus.php>

¹² 2020 Thomas McAfee Funeral Homes, How we are addressing coronavirus concerns, <https://www.thomasmcafee.com/covid-19-procedure>