

How Coronavirus is affecting funerals – April 12th 2021

As you will be aware, we are currently facing a worldwide coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic. We would like to provide reassurance that our commitment to caring for bereaved people and their loved ones will remain steadfast throughout this period of ongoing uncertainty and disruption.

If you are feeling unwell and feel you may pose a risk by attending a funeral, we would advise and urge you to follow the NHS and Government guidelines.

In our efforts to protect families and everyone involved in arranging funerals, we continue to operate within a range of infection control options in line with the latest advice given by the Prime Minister and Public Health England. We are also working with partners, such as local crematoria and burial grounds, to ensure we comply with their various coronavirus procedures. As such, if we find ourselves in a position of increased risk to health, and at risk of furthering the spread of coronavirus, it is possible that we **may** need to take actions with immediate effect to ensure the safety of yourselves, our staff and the wider general public.

We have already found ourselves in a position of increased risk to health, and at risk of furthering the spread of coronavirus, and we **have** implemented the following actions for the safety of the public and our staff:

- Within the current lockdown, our offices are open, by appointment only, for arranging a funeral, visits to our Chapels of Rest, for signing forms where necessary, and for dropping off essential funeral related items. Face masks are now mandatory within funeral homes so should be worn by all those without an exemption – our staff will all be wearing a covering during any meeting and on the funeral itself.
- Funeral arrangements can continue to be made over the phone, or video call, with the necessary forms able to be signed digitally via email; by post; by being brought to your house or we can arrange a visit to a controlled area of one of our offices for form signing. We are now able to speak with families face to face, in our branches, where social distancing and the wearing of masks will be observed.
- Services at places of worship or at any other venue are limited in varying ways due to the pandemic – we have information or can obtain information for all venues. At crematoria, funeral services can currently be live streamed via the internet and we will provide advice aimed at ensuring everyone who needs to view the service is able to do so where possible. Face masks are also now mandatory in all places of worship and crematoria.
- The guidelines about funeral attendance have changed and we must also adhere to current government advice.
 - No more than 30 close family and friends may attend, whether indoors or outdoors. Some venues have restricted this further to allow for social distancing. Anyone working is not included in this number.
 - Those travelling from outside the Common Travel Area (UK) must follow the requirement to quarantine for 10 days, but can leave their place of self-isolation in limited circumstances which includes compassionate grounds (i.e. attending a funeral)
 - Those symptomatic should not attend a funeral
 - Those self-isolating due to a household member being unwell, but not symptomatic themselves, can attend but must maintain a 2 metre distance from others and advise both us, and other mourners, of this to ensure they do not attend at the same time as another mourner who may be clinically vulnerable.
- Pre- and post-funeral gatherings can only be held in line with the current government guidelines which currently state that the maximum gathering is for up to 15 people.
- Within the government guidelines for funerals all venues are requested to keep a temporary record of visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for the venue. This is to assist the NHS Track and Trace and could contain outbreaks of infection. Each family will be issued with a form to collect the names and contact details of those attending the funeral. Should a case occur from a venue, we will contact you to advise you to

pass on the information to all those who have attended the funeral. Please ask if you have not been issued with this form. It only needs to be kept for 21 days following the funeral.

- Within the latest guidelines it states, 'you should avoid singing, shouting, chanting or a raised voice because this may increase the risk of airborne transmission of the virus'. Some professional, socially distanced vocal or instrumental contributions can be included, either indoors or outdoors, but outside wherever possible. Singing should be limited to a small, set group of no more than 6 people, staying at least 2 metres apart, and should not include audience participation.
- Limousine travel is available - we have installed a sealed screen in each of our limousines to separate the driver from the passengers. Each limousine will be deep cleaned after each use and will have PPE available for both the driver, and the passengers should it be required. Passengers are legally required to wear face mask within the limousines, and you should avoid travelling with someone from outside your household or social bubble. There is a limit of 5 mourners per limousine.
- We have a Go-Pro available to record the journey to the funeral venue should you wish, and also a small PA system for services held at the graveside. Please ask should you like further information on these.
- Viewing is possible, in all branches. We ask, in line with government guidelines, that a maximum of 5 people (at any one time) from the same social bubble, attend our chapels by appointment only. We are unfortunately unable to bring any coffin's home at this time.
- We have implemented a policy that wherever possible we will not be accepting payments by cash or cheque. Payments can be made directly to our bank account via BACS - arrangers have the details of our bank account number.
- We ask that **all donations** in memory of your loved one are placed on-line via our tribute page on www.wathalls.co.uk. For donations to charities not on our online platform we are able to accept these by BACS to our donation account.

We ask that all visitors to our office are aware of the following:

- Our reception doors may be locked. Please follow the instructions on the door to meet with a member of staff. We have hand sanitiser and face masks available in our reception's – please help us to keep you safe by using them. Our staff sometimes find that a client will want to shake hands or give them a kiss or hug to say thank you for supporting them through a difficult time. We politely ask that you refrain from doing this during this period.

As this is a fast-moving scenario these actions are likely to change as we receive further advice from both the government and public health departments. Further information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

Thank you for your understanding.

Helen Wathall,
Managing Director
Wathall's