

Practical Guidance for Funerals, Wakes or Memorials during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Introduction

It is difficult to lose a loved one under normal circumstances, and it is more difficult given the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. We understand that the need to gather, to recognize, to mourn, to support each other, is human and a significant part of our Haudenosaunee cultural practices. Not being able to have a funeral, memorial or other traditional/cultural ceremony following the death of a loved one, can be heartbreaking.

Funerals, however, like all other public gatherings, are very risky at this time. Even small gatherings can increase the possibility of spreading the COVID-19 virus. It can be particularly dangerous for Elders and people with pre-existing medical conditions to attend events such as funerals. It is essential that public health directives regarding public gatherings and physical distancing continue to be followed under all circumstances.

For Longhouse funerals, another guidance was developed by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council of Chiefs. See attached letter in the Appendix for this guidance and direction.



The following guidance comes from the First Nations Inuit Health Branch and the Ministry of Health. These guidelines help to outline how to ensure COVID-19 is not transmitted during a funeral or service. This guidance should be followed regardless of the cause of death.

Planning a Funeral

Although burials should take place in a timely manner, in accordance with local practices, funeral ceremonies not involving the burial should be postponed, as much as possible (see attached letter from Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council of Chiefs for guidance on longhouse funeral ceremony protocols).

The dignity of the deceased, their cultural and spiritual traditions, and their families should be respected and protected throughout. People who have died from COVID-19 can be buried or cremated.



Provincial and territorial restrictions to contain the spread of COVID-19 may also affect funerals, as well as cemetery and crematorium operations, even when the death was unrelated to COVID-19.

Planning a Funeral

The Expedited Death Response, introduced by the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario on Tuesday, April 14, 2020, means that families now need to choose their funeral home immediately upon the death of a loved one in hospital or long-term care facility in order to expedite disposition of the deceased. The focus here is to prevent the sad state of stockpiling deceased loved ones, which is occurring in other countries during this pandemic.



In-person witnessing at cremations is prohibited as of April 22, meaning no one other than crematorium staff can be present to see a cremation occur in real-time. To alleviate some stress on families who are accustomed to this, online video recorded playback of the cremation of a loved one is permitted.

Viewing of the body and/or funeral service

Wakes and funerals are unique situations due to their emotional and spiritual components. If burial is being postponed, viewing of the deceased is still possible. Whether the viewing is in the home, or in a pre-determined facility, the following procedures are recommended:

- 1** Consider the use of virtual technologies (e.g. telephone, video conference, video recordings) in place of in-person services and gatherings. If anything is shared publicly or privately, it will need to be in keeping with the family wishes.
- 2** Consider limiting the number of people involved in the ceremony to only members of the immediate family/same household.
- 3** The new maximum number of people who can be at a funeral home at one time is 10 or fewer. This pertains to the entire funeral home.
- 4** Physical distancing of all individuals, including the funeral director, religious leader, Elder or others, should be at least 2 meters or 6 feet at all times. In cases where space is limited, particularly in homes, the numbers allowed into the venue should be controlled or consider holding the ceremony outside to maintain physical distance.
- 5** If the funeral is inside, you must wear a face mask to limit the transmission of COVID-19. Have at least one lined wastebasket to dispose of used masks at the funeral site. Wash your hands or use alcohol based hand sanitizer before and after putting on and taking off your face mask. If a mask becomes wet or soiled replace it immediately with a new one.

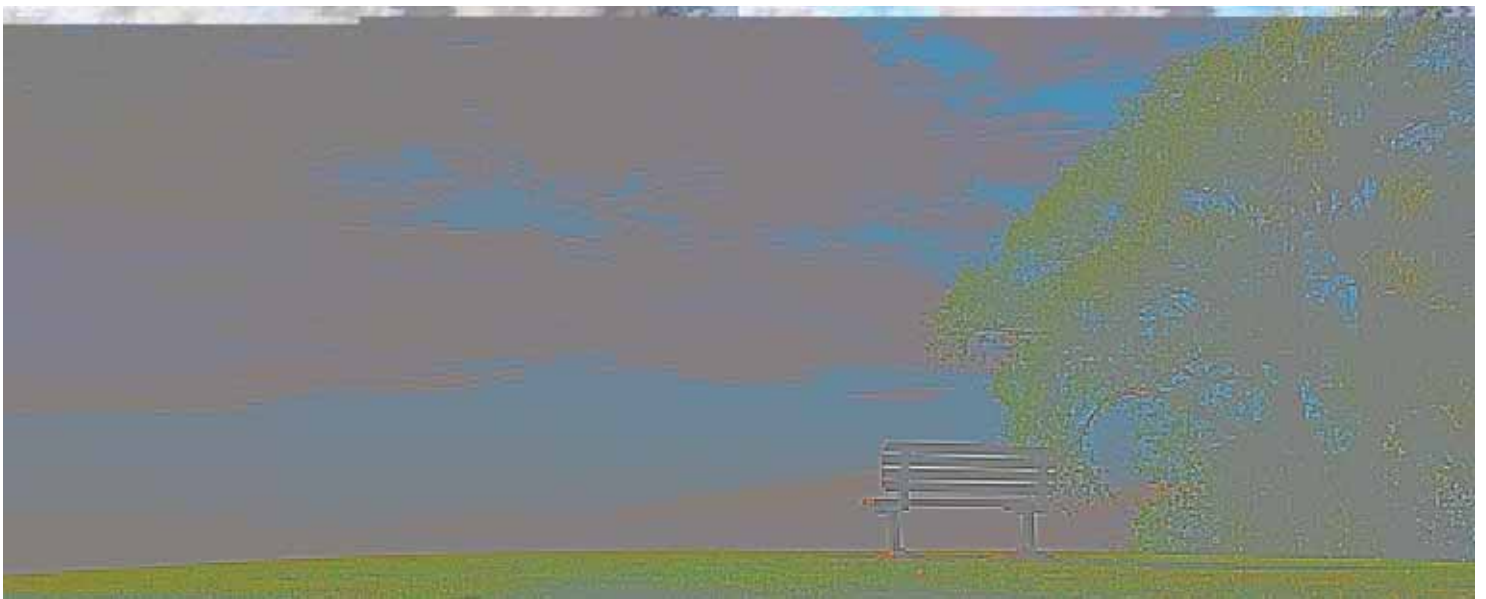
Viewing of the body and/or funeral service

- 6** Individuals who are ill, or have high-risk medical conditions must not attend. Friends, family and other visitors should not touch or kiss the body.
- 7** Do not share bowls, utensils, pipes, or ceremonial objects.
- 8** Should touching of the body or clothing occur, ensure that the individuals wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer (with alcohol content 60% or more).
- 9** Maintain a list of all participants, in the event that contact tracing needs to be done.
- 10** DO NOT permit self-serve buffets. If necessary, provide single-serve foods in individual containers, while maintaining physical distancing of 2 metres or 6 feet.



Viewing of the body and/or funeral service

- 11** Individuals tasked with burying the body (placing in the grave), should wear gloves and masks, and once burial is complete, remove gloves and wash hands with soap and water, or apply hand sanitizer.
- 12** Other activities, such as kissing, washing, and shrouding should be avoided before, during, and after the body has been prepared, if possible.
- 13** If contact with the body is important due to religious or cultural practices, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible.
- 14** If contact cannot be avoided, family or community members should, at minimum, wear disposable gloves disposed in a no-touch waste receptacle and perform appropriate hand hygiene.
- 15** Additional PPE should be recommended based on the activity to be performed.



Considerations for death in a community

The majority of deaths from COVID-19 are likely to occur in healthcare settings where healthcare personnel are available, and have access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to manage the dead bodies.



However, in the event that a community member is suspected to have died of COVID-19 related illness outside of a healthcare facility, such as in the home, please contact healthcare personnel immediately to remove the body.

Appropriate precautions should then be taken to clean and disinfect that area appropriately, once the body has been removed following the Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection and Waste Management recommendations seen on the next page.



Environmental cleaning, disinfection and waste management if the deceased was suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19

Cleaning and Disinfecting

All cleaning products should be used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions:

Please refer to instructions on hard-surface disinfectants for use against coronavirus (COVID-19), and Health Canada's approved List of hard-surface disinfectants for use against coronavirus (COVID-19). Environmental cleaning products registered in Canada with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) and labelled as a broad-spectrum virucide are sufficient for SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19 disease,



OR

A diluted bleach solution (0.1% sodium hypochlorite, i.e. a ratio of 1 teaspoon (5 mL) per cup (250 mL) OR 4 teaspoons (20 mL) per litre (1000mL) of clean water) or 70% ethanol may also be used to disinfect, as these solutions are expected to significantly reduce coronavirus infectivity on surfaces within 1 minute.

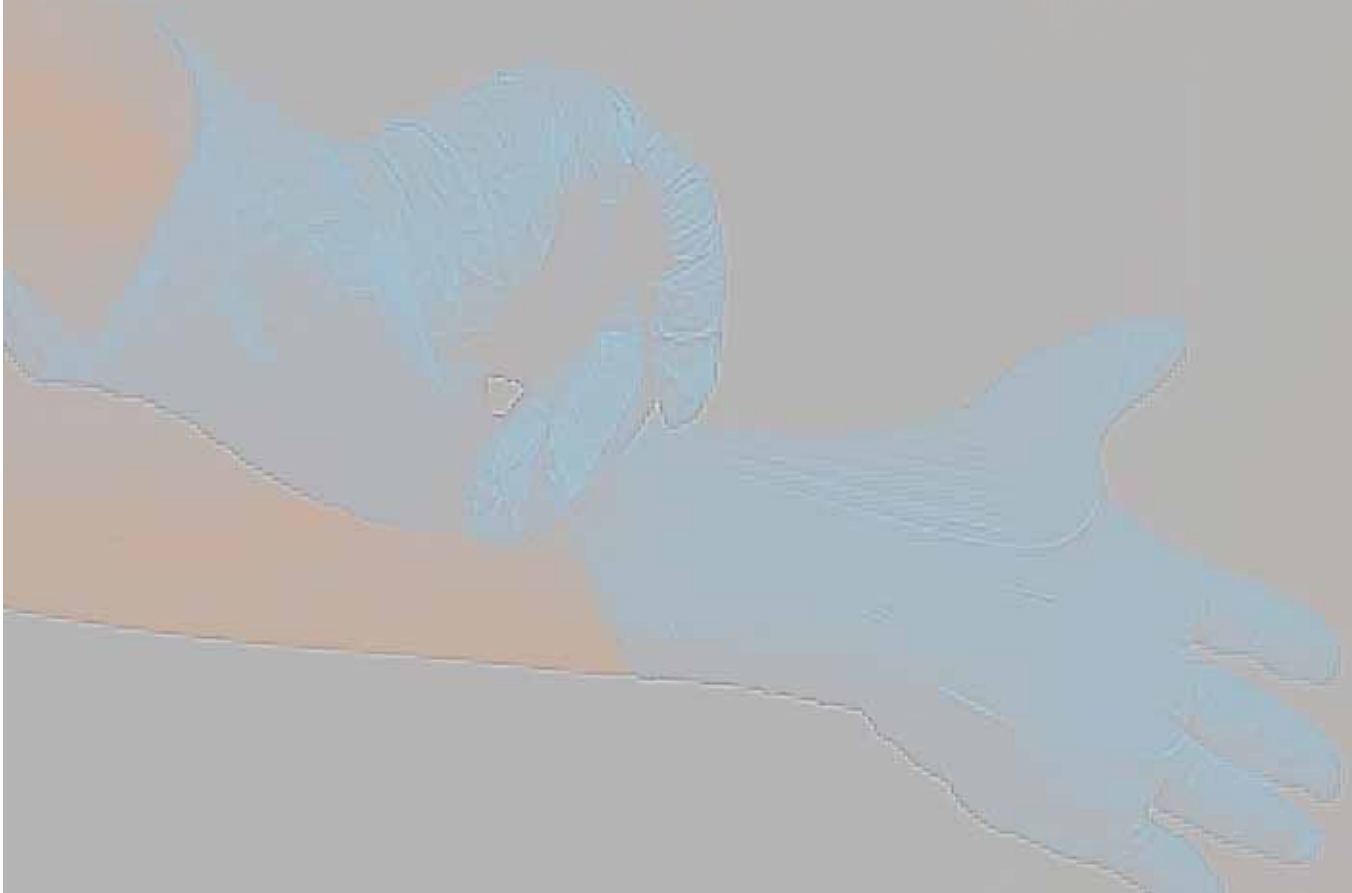
Cleaning and Disinfecting

Wear disposable gloves and aprons (as required) for cleaning. After use, these should be double-bagged, stored securely for 72 hours, then thrown away in regular garbage after cleaning is finished.

Using a disposable cloth, first clean hard surfaces with warm soapy water. Then disinfect these surfaces with the cleaning products you normally use. Pay particular attention to frequently touched areas and surfaces, such as bathrooms, grab-rails in corridors and stairwells and door handles.

If an area has been heavily contaminated, such as with visible bodily fluids, from a person with coronavirus (COVID-19), please contact local health authority for assistance as they are equipped with the appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE).

Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, after cleaning contact areas.



Laundry

- All laundry used by the deceased (linen and clothing), should be placed in a laundry basket/plastic bag.
- Machine wash laundry in hot water (60 - 90°C) and laundry detergent.
- If machine washing is not possible, soak clothing hot water and soap in a large bucket/drum using a stick/rod to stir, being careful to avoid splashing.
- Empty the bucket/drum, and soak laundry in 0.05% chlorine for approximately 30 minutes (this may cause discolouration).
- Rinse laundry with clean water, and place in dryer or allow to fully dry in sunlight.



Waste

- Use gloves, if possible when handling waste.
- Place waste in plastic garbage bag.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer (with alcohol content of at least 60%) after disposing the garbage bag.

Need Support?

The following organizations have resources that can be helpful with mental health or grief support:

Six Nations Crisis Line: 519-445-2204 OR 1-866-445-2204

Six Nations Mental Health and Addictions: 519-445-2143

Mental Health Helpline (National) : 1-866-531- 2600

Grief and Bereavement Support

Ogwanohgwatraę:’ Tsęh Niyogwai:ho’dę: (226) 227-9990

Six Nations Home and Community Care: 519-445-0077

Funeral Homes

Hyde & Mott Chapel
60 Main Street South
Hagersville
Ontario
N0A1H0
Telephone: 905-768-5733

RHB Anderson Funeral Homes Ltd.
PO Box 352
Hagersville
Ontario
N0A1H0
E-mail: rhba@rhbanderson.com
Telephone: 905-768-5733



Appendix



Six Nations "Iroquois" Confederacy GRAND RIVER COUNTRY

2634 6th Line R.R.# 2 Ohsweken, ON N0A 1M0

April 14, 2020

Fire Chief Matthew Miller
Six Nations Fire Department & Emergency Services
17 Veterans Ln
Ohsweken, ON N0A 1M0

Greetings:

The Chiefs and Clanmothers have considered the safety of all the people while still fulfilling as best we can the protocols for a funeral. We understand the family might be faced with self-isolation or having to quarantine due to being tested or testing positive with the Covid virus. This may create hardships for families to prepare everything required of them with the death of their Loved One, such as, shopping.

The following guidelines have been agreed upon:

1. The family will take the clothes to the funeral home and the funeral home will dress the Loved One that has passed, they will then bring the Loved One directly from funeral home to the site of burial at the Longhouse at 11am.
2. At the longhouse, Set up of a 10 x 10 tent over the burial site. Bring the Loved One to the burial site and have the casket open. (Relaying to the family to bring chairs for themselves that they can take with them after). Also, we are asking to limit the amount of people to 10, only immediate family.
3. As for the speaker appointed or asked, PPE gear needs to be utilized from the emergency control group.
4. Do the Speech of Strengthening the Minds as best as possible (left to the speaker's discretion). Then speak to the one that has passed on, telling the situation and for nothing to bother their mind. Tell the people to go around and view.
5. Allow everyone to pass by the open casket to allow the grieving process and to maintain a 2- metre distance from casket.
6. Lower the Loved one back to our Mother Earth and continue with the words for their journey.

7. The immediate family can then go back for a private meal. Still setting out a plate as following protocol.

8. For the 10 days, the immediate family can follow the protocol of setting out a plate at every snack/meal including the supper of the 10th night. The 10-day feast will not be conducted because of safety and stress on the family.

Instead, we will burn tobacco asking that we're not able to fulfill it fully when a person passes because of the situation. We will acknowledge there may be more than one person that we lose during the pandemic and once the virus subsides, we will do a combined feast for all the families of the Longhouses that lost their Loved One.

We are also asking everyone to put off any medicines or feasts that can be done at a later date including one-year feasts. This too will be covered in the tobacco burning. We realize there maybe "911" emergency feasts that still have to be put through, for these we are asking to be as safe as possible and limit the amount of people to the best of your ability.

These are the precautions and protocols we ask are followed during this time to ensure the safety of the family, the speakers and their families, and all of our precious community.

In Peace and friendship,

The Chiefs and Clanmothers of the HCCC

cc: R.H.B. Anderson Funeral Homes