



# COVID-19 Indigenous Community Funeral Guidelines

## Purpose:

This document provides guidance to help support Indigenous communities and family members to remain safe while attending funerals during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## Please Note:

The Canadian Red Cross (CRC) acknowledges the diversity among Indigenous peoples in Canada. Each community has unique funeral practices and traditional protocols specific to their culture. During COVID-19, we may be unable to fully respect these important traditional protocols. Working together, we can find unique and innovative ways to adapt and prevent the spread of COVID-19 among Indigenous communities and family members, while acknowledging traditional practices. Community leaders who would like to have a dialogue around specific concerns are invited to call the CRC Help Desk, at **1-833-937-1597**.

## Proceeding with a funeral during COVID-19

- 1) **Physical Distancing:** It is recommended no gathering exceeds 5-10 people for optimal safety. These individuals must adhere to the no contact and 2-meter physical distancing guidelines (or regional equivalent). This includes handshaking, hugging, or any form of human contact to limit transmission of COVID-19. Community members from the same household are exempt from the 2-meter guideline.
- 2) **Masks/Face-coverings:** Wearing masks/face coverings is an additional protective measure, especially when it is not possible to consistently maintain a 2-metre physical distance from others. Have at least one lined wastebasket to dispose of used masks at the funeral site. It is safest to wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after putting on and taking off masks/face coverings. If a mask becomes wet or soiled replace it immediately with a new one. If you click on link #6 at the end of the page under "References" you can access the latest guidelines and extra resources for each geographical area.
- 3) **Hygiene Stations:** Individuals must avoid touching their faces. Should someone need to cough and/or sneeze have tissues available that can then be immediately disposed of into lined wastebaskets followed by proper handwashing. People should be encouraged to cough or sneeze into their elbow or a tissue and not into their masks/face coverings. Have hand wash stations with lined wastebaskets visible with signage to encourage constant cleansing of hands. If hand washing stations are not available, hand sanitizer is a recommended alternative. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/hand-sanitizer.html>



- 4) **Location:** Have funeral services outside (if possible) this allows for easier social distancing and increased ventilation. It is vital to ensure all areas are regularly disinfected throughout the day, particularly high traffic areas. Consider creating a cleaning schedule for this task and assigning someone to carry it out. Limit the number of people in common areas such as the bathroom and kitchen and note limits with signage. Try to reduce the number of chairs and seating areas to a minimum while respecting social distancing and 'cleaning between use' guidelines.
- 5) **Spiritual Practices:** To ensure proper social distancing, enact a schedule for traditional protocol duties such as fire keeping, drumming/singing, offerings and prayers. During ceremony, continue to enforce social distancing, and when possible allow families to rotate in and around the ceremonial area. Designate a location for offerings to be dropped off for people who could not attend.

If you click on link #6 at the end of the page under "References" you can access the latest guidelines and extra resources for each geographical area.

### Funeral practices to be omitted from service.

- **Viewing of the body:** This practice encourages large gatherings indoors. Without strongly enforced and strict physical distancing measures in place, we do not recommend a public viewing of the body.
- **Potluck/Community Feast:** We do not recommend food consumption at any type of social gathering during COVID-19. Food offerings from individual family feasts can be offered however you see fit.
- **Cleansing the body:** We recommend the family does not fulfil this practice if the death is related to COVID-19, and to work with your community to fulfill the responsibility in an alternative way.

### Alternative funeral options.

- **Utilizing Technology:** We understand that some nations do not allow ceremony to be videotaped or recorded. If possible and without recording, we recommend using live-streaming capabilities to let community members and distant family members take part in the service from the safety of their homes. If video is not an option, possibly allow for a live audio to be broadcast or shared.
- **Cremation:** If your beliefs allow, we recommend Cremation. Cremation can allow families to postpone services and/or allow for more time to prepare and apply proper COVID-19 community funeral guidelines safely.



- **Postponing:** The easiest and safest way to prevent exposure to COVID-19 is to postpone the funeral and ceremony until the Provincial Public Health officer lifts the bans on large gatherings and it is once again safe for community members to gather. Although this would be the best way to prevent exposure and transmission, we recognize that this is not an option for most nations and Indigenous communities.

*This guidance from the Canadian Red Cross is based on the evidence available to date and follows the guidelines provided by Public Health authorities.*

## References:

- 1) Martin, Lesley. "Indigenous and industry perspectives on funerary trends and their impact on Indigenous client services in urban and peri-urban centers of Manitoba, Canada." (2020).
- 2) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/tribal/faq-burial-practice.html>
- 3) <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/death-care-services-handling-dead-bodies.html#a1>
- 4) Secwepemc Health Caucus, Secwepemc Nation – Funeral Protocol – COVID-19 ([www.secwepemchealth.ca](http://www.secwepemchealth.ca))
- 5) <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>
- 6) <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms/provincial-territorial-resources-covid-19.html>