**Briefing: Funeral Guidance**

The Scottish Government has today published [new guidance on funerals](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-funeral-services-in-places-of-worship/pages/providing-funeral-services/). It is not markedly different to the current guidance and is consistent with the [current advice](https://www.bcos.org.uk/COVID19/tabid/127/Default.aspx) of the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland.

Most importantly the same rules apply in terms of who can attend e.g. same household and close family and, failing that, close friends.

In terms of the number of mourners permitted, please note that our guidance has now been amended to advise the following: **the number of mourners should be agreed in consultation with the parish priest and limited according to government guidelines. The Bishops’ Conference of Scotland suggests a maximum of 15 mourners.**

Below are some of the key points from the new government guidance. You can access the full document using the link, above.

**General guidance**

Places of worship should:

* put in place measures to ensure that all individuals, including attendees, those facilitating a service, volunteers and celebrants can keep 2 metres apart from other individuals not in their household group. The only exception is a carer and the person being assisted by the carer. To help do this places of worship should consider setting out floor markings, removing/cordoning off furniture/fittings, marked out designated areas where different households may stand or sit at least 2 metres apart during a service
* clearly communicate the physical distancing requirements to all those attending
* make clear that attendees should be limited to only household members of the person who has died and close family. Where no household members or close family are attending, those who are a friend of the person who has died can attend, in line with the 2020 Regulations
* make clear that in-person attendance to a funeral should be kept to the minimum number of people possible
* restrict the number of attendees, if necessary, to ensure that the requirements of the 2020 Regulations, this guidance and physical distancing can be adhered to, taking into account local risk assessments, circumstances and facilities
* advise those who are unable to attend in person to join remotely via electronic means (if available)
* examine how celebrants, or those who are volunteering to facilitate a service, can safely adhere to physical distancing requirements. Wherever possible, a local policy should be created that will set out how those who are delivering a funeral service can do so as safely as possible. This will likely include keeping celebrants or volunteers to the minimum number possible
* where possible, consider how to manage the flow of household groups in and out of a building to minimise overlap between different groups and to help facilitate cleaning processes
* seek to provide hand washing or sanitisation facilities for before and after a service
* if possible, open windows and doors to increase ventilation (fire doors should remain closed)
* put in place a policy to ensure that after that each funeral service, the space where a funeral is held and/or objects frequently touched by attendees (such as door handles) are cleaned. This should be done in line with Health Protection Scotland’s [COVID-19: Guidance for non-healthcare settings](https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings/) guidance
* depending on the frequency of use of the places of worship, as a further precaution environmental cleaning can also be carried out before a service is due to be held. A local risk assessment will need to be undertaken
* refer to the [Scottish Government’s guidance for reopening for individual prayer or contemplation](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/) for further practical steps that can be taken to help mitigate the risk of infection in a place of worship
* sensitively advise mourners of these requirements and signpost to this guidance and Scottish Government [funeral services](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-funeral-services/) guidance

### Funeral rites or rituals

Those responsible for a place of worship should examine how funeral rites and rituals (not involving handling or caring for the deceased) are observed at this time and the potential associated opportunity for transmission with reference to how [COVID-19 can be spread and mitigated](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-general-advice).

A local policy reflecting how any such rites and rituals can be carried out as safely as possible will need to be developed and implemented. [Guidance on individual prayer or contemplation](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/) sets out steps on how faith-specific practices might be managed.

## **Attendees**

The 2020 Regulations do not specify a number of attendees that may attend a funeral.  Following these Regulations coming into force on 26 March 2020, burial and cremation authorities (as well as a small number of places of worship) have continued to offer funeral services in as safe a manner as possible and as appropriate to their facilities.

This has involved many authorities implementing a maximum number of attendees, based on the need to minimise in person attendees, the spaces or facilitates they are responsible for and the staff they have available to manage funeral services as safely as possible.

Those responsible for places of worship can consider this approach for offering funeral services in regard to their own circumstances and requirements.

Setting a maximum number of attendees for particular places of worship will likely act as an effective method of managing expectations in their community at this difficult time.

Any guidance provided to communities on numbers attending a service in a place of worship must remain in line with wider requirements for funeral services set out above, taking into account the 2020 Regulations and that in person attendance at a funeral service should continue to be minimised as far as possible.