



Briefing 20 – 26

April 2020

## **Public Health England - new guidance to ensure funerals are conducted safely and consistent with social distancing principles.**

This briefing is provided to all APSE member authorities but will be of particular interest to those officers responsible for cemetery and crematoria services.

### **Key Issues:**

- With the onset of ever more stringent measures to control the spread of the Coronavirus, PHE has issued guidance on how COVID-19 related deaths should be dealt with to ensure those dealing with the deceased and providing other services such as funerals, can act in order to prevent the spread of the virus.
- PHE has consulted with faith leaders to ensure the different practices and procedures, such as ritual washing and funerary services have been considered.
- The guidance also offers guidance to other services and professions which are associated with the handling of the deceased and the provision of funeral services such as coroners, pathologists and funeral directors.
- This short briefing provides the background to the guidance, its main aims and a link to the full document.

### **Background**

Public Health England (PHE), following consultation with faith leaders has issued guidance as to how communities, the funeral industry and NHS workers can best be protected when dealing with COVID-19 related deaths.

The guidance covers both the treatment of the deceased and the protection of workers and mourners alike.

The guidance brings together previous information and now provides the most up-to-date advice and guidance in this field.

Coronavirus COVID-19 is an infectious disease and is readily transmitted when large groups of people gather together such as at funerals. Therefore, certain precautions need to take place if funerals are to continue and these are included in the guidance provided.

In addition, the guidance highlights that there is a potential risk of transmission from the body of the deceased. Therefore further advice is provided for carrying out safe practice for anyone coming into contact with the body.

Comments have been received on the guidance and have noted that whilst it is clearly understood that the loss of a loved one is distressing, during the current circumstances there is a need to protect the most vulnerable from the spread of the virus, hence the advice on restricting mourner numbers is welcome, as is the confirmation about the need to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

For those faiths which practice ritual washing, the guidance provides advice on the types of personal protective equipment required to ensure the safety of the person carrying out the cleaning.

The guidance also assists professionals such as coroners, pathologists and funeral directors.

It should be noted that this guidance remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation as required.

The following link provides access to the PHE guidance note.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

### **APSE Comment**

APSE welcomes this guidance, as from ongoing dialogue with its members responsible for this area of work, it is clear there is a wide variety of different practices being undertaken, for example how funerals are carried out, number of mourners allowed, protection of staff and mourners etc. albeit all services are following proper and legal requirements.

Through the provision of this guidance, PHE has provided a uniformity of approach thereby avoiding confusion and conflicting reports on the risks of handling COVID-19 deceased persons.

By following these precautions funeral workers and mourners alike can safely respect and maintain the dignity of the deceased.

APSE will continue to support its members through daily monitoring and disseminating information as it becomes available.

APSE's network query service will still be operational and advice will be forthcoming as and when it is received.

Members should look out for regular updates either via the APSE website or through short briefings such as these.

Undoubtedly there will be significant changes and demands being placed on local authorities but through the sharing of information and experiences we will undoubtedly rise to the challenge and meet the needs of our public and customers.

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**Principal Advisor**