



Gatherings of people for funeral services - risk assessment framework

Updated 18 March 2020

The current message from the Government is that funerals should continue, as far as possible, for now, but taking into account all of the guidelines issued for minimising the risk of transmission.

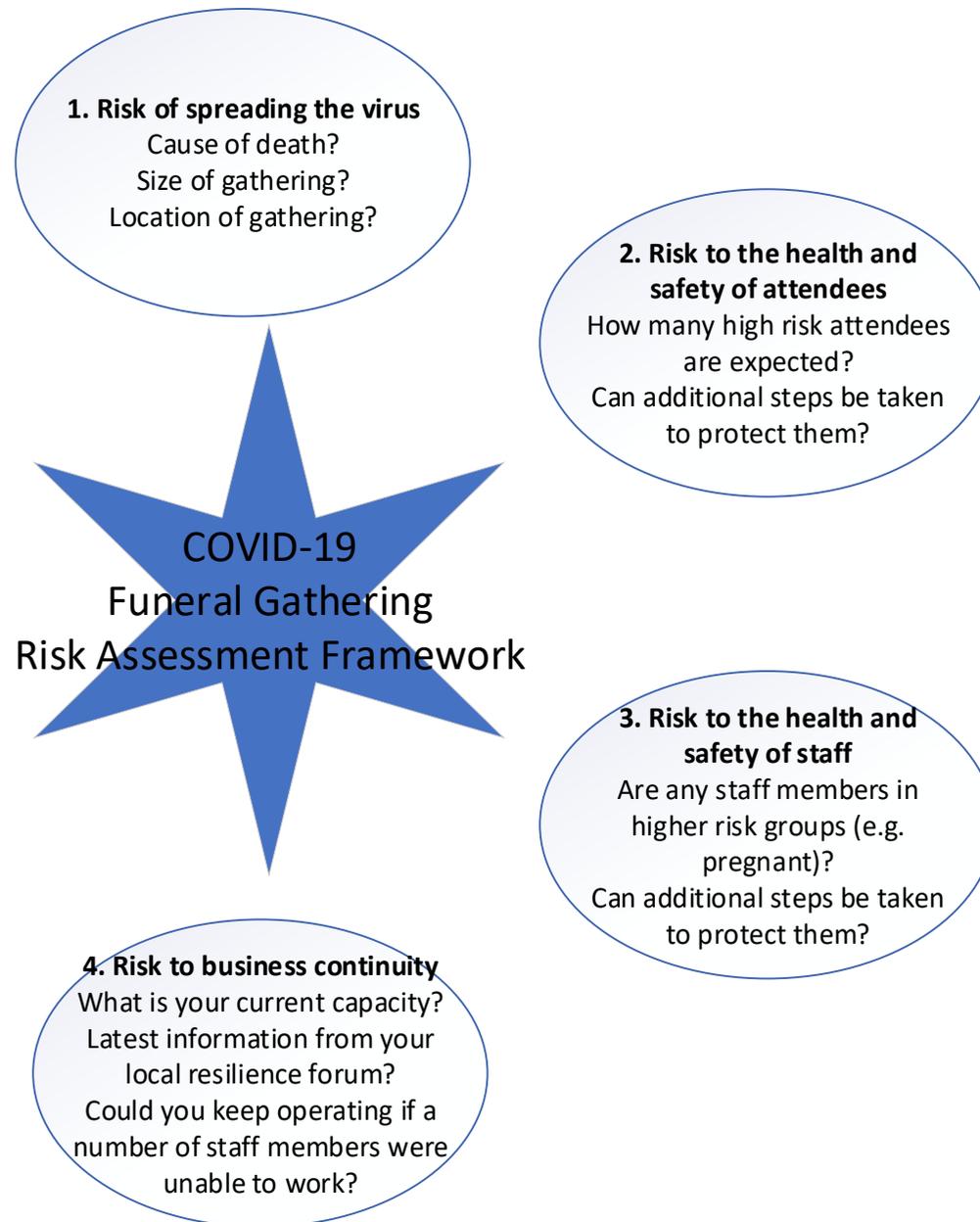
This includes the need to protect at-risk groups, to avoid large gatherings of people, for good hand hygiene and the avoiding of unnecessary physical contact. This is not only for the benefit of those attending funerals, it also supports the urgent need to protect funeral home, crematorium and cemetery employees, who need to remain healthy and able to work at this critical time.

In consultation with your local crematoria and cemeteries, you should assess each funeral individually and consider whether it might mean smaller numbers of people and organising a celebration of life or memorial service planned for a later date. Alternatives such as webcasting may enable other mourners to participate.

The framework set out below is designed to assist funeral businesses in conducting these risk assessments. It is unlikely that a funeral directing business will not be able to arrange a funeral, provided the client accepts the need to take steps to mitigate the risk to others.

However, if, having considered each of these factors, you do not feel comfortable arranging the funeral in accordance with your client's instructions, you should not progress the arrangements. This will be difficult to explain to some families but funeral directors have a serious responsibility to take steps to prevent harm to staff, attendees and the wider population.

This is a fast-evolving situation and guidance may well need to be updated again in the near future. On Friday the UK Government will bring forward the Coronavirus Bill which is a time-limited piece of legislation designed to give public bodies across the UK the tools and powers they need to carry out an effective response to this emergency.



Risk factor	Considerations	Possible mitigating steps
<p>1. Risk of spreading the virus</p>	<p>If a death is COVID-19 related, this will likely increase the risk that immediate family members will have been exposed to the virus.</p>	<p>You should take steps to ensure all initial contact with the family (e.g. the arrangement meeting) is conducted remotely, via telephone or video link. Assess whether they are in the Government-advised 14-day household isolation period and what effect that will have on the timings of the funeral service.</p> <p>You and your staff should only physically meet with family members if you are satisfied that doing so is consistent with government advice. As mentioned above, current advice is that members of the same household as an infected person or someone showing symptoms should self-isolate for 14 days before coming into contact with anyone else.</p> <p>You should consider any available options to minimise contact between potentially contagious people and people who have not been infected by the virus. For example, restricting the number of physical attendees but webcasting or recording (DVD/audio) the service for others could be an effective way of reducing this risk. You can also ask where applicable that attendees keep to the social distancing recommendation of two metres apart.</p>
	<p>What is the size of any proposed gathering of people? The more people brought together in a single place, the greater the risk of spreading the disease.</p>	<p>Anyone who is experiencing symptoms, such as a dry cough or fever (or lives with someone experiencing such symptoms) should be self-isolating, but you should underline this with the client to ensure that anyone experiencing symptoms refrains from attending.</p> <p>It is recommended that you keep attendance size to as small a number as possible and practicable.</p> <p>You could consider any available options to minimise contact between potentially contagious people and people who have not been infected by the virus. For example, restricting the</p>

		<p>number of physical attendees to very close friends and family but webcasting the service for others could be an effective way of reducing this risk. Asking attendees to use the space available to follow, where they can, social distancing guidelines.</p>
	<p>Where will the gathering be held? Services in indoor venues such as churches and funeral homes increase the risk that the disease will be spread. Outdoor services (e.g. at the graveside) carry a lower risk.</p>	<p>You could talk to the family about the possibility of an outdoor service.</p> <p>Again, you could discuss the option of webcasting/recording the service for some or all attendees.</p> <p>You should talk to the venue about its cleaning regime, particularly in crematoria where contamination spread is a greater risk given the higher number of people attending the building on any given day.</p>
	<p>Other practical steps to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donation boxes - Your property - Limousines - Viewing 	<p>It is worth considering not having donation boxes at the funeral, but encouraging clients to use an online platform such as justgiving.com. This will help prevent spread because the box and money inside will be touched by numerous people. It also allows non-attendees to donate.</p> <p>You should remember areas of your property that have come into contact with members of the public and regularly clean them. Eg, wiping down limousine door handles.</p> <p>You should consider asking clients to use their own transport where possible and may even wish to consider ceasing limousine hire for the time being, as it can be the place where longest period of time is spent in close proximity to clients.</p> <p>You should consider allowing only very close family members to a viewing on your premises, and install hand sanitiser in all public areas.</p>

<p>2. Risk to health and safety of individual attendees</p>	<p>What is the likely demographic make-up of attendees?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are a significant number of attendees from higher risk groups (e.g. over 70s) likely to want to attend? - Are there any high-risk individuals (e.g. over 70s, pregnant women, immunocompromised) likely to want to attend? 	<p>You should ask that anyone who is experiencing symptoms, such as a dry cough or fever (or lives with someone experiencing such symptoms) refrains from attending.</p> <p>Anyone at the high-risk category who has been contacted by the NHS to stay at home should refrain from attending.</p> <p>You could consider restricting the number of physical attendees to very close friends and family who are not from high risk groups.</p> <p>Webcasting or recording the service could be an effective way of reducing this risk.</p> <p>You could remind attendees that physical contact with others (e.g. hugging and shaking hands) risks spreading the virus. You should request that attendees follow social distancing guidelines.</p>
<p>3. Risk to health and safety of individual staff members</p>	<p>You should not knowingly ask staff members to physically meet with individuals who, according to government advice, should be in self-isolation.</p>	<p>You and your staff should only physically meet with family members if you are satisfied that doing so is consistent with government advice (see link below).</p> <p>Anyone experiencing symptoms, such as a dry cough or fever (or lives with someone experiencing such symptoms) should be self-isolating but you should check with your client.</p> <p>If you come into contact with someone you believe is showing symptoms you should not feel embarrassed about keeping a safe distance from them and not coming into direct contact with them, and explain why if necessary.</p> <p>If you think there is a risk that the bereaved family should be in self-isolation, you should take steps to ensure all initial contact with the family (e.g. the arrangement meeting) is conducted remotely, via telephone or video link.</p>

	<p>Do you have a member of staff in a higher risk group (pregnant, over 70, immunocompromised) who should be kept away from large gatherings?</p>	<p>You should consider ways in which you can limit high risk staff members' physical contact with groups of people.</p> <p>You should remind all attendees that they should not touch or shake hands with staff members.</p> <p>You should consider where else, where appropriate, they can be employed in the business.</p>
	<p>Risk also means considering employees' mental health and listening to their concerns</p>	<p>Keep in very regular contact with your employees about what they are thinking and how they are mentally feeling, and act accordingly. It may be that staff appear perfectly fit and well, but have concerns or fears they have not expressed to you but will impact on their mental health and performance.</p>
<p>4. Risk to business continuity (this is a general risk but will impact on your risk-assessments in relation to individual funerals)</p>	<p>It is vitally important that funeral directing businesses can continue to operate over the coming weeks and months.</p> <p>What is your local resilience forum telling you?</p> <p>What is your current capacity?</p> <p>Could you keep operating if a number of staff members had to self-isolate or became unwell?</p> <p>Do you have a contingency plan?</p>	<p>If your own business, or local resilience network, is under strain, it may be appropriate to take additional measures to protect the workforce in order to ensure that funeral service capacity in your area is not overwhelmed. In particular, this could mean treating all funerals as high risk and limiting the number of attendees/mode of attendance.</p> <p>As you notice a shift in your ability to operate normally, ensure you keep in regular communication with staff and clients, particularly through digital (website), social media and direct contact (email)</p>
<p>5. Availability of alternative options</p>	<p>Is a webcasting service available at the crematorium?</p> <p>Can you record on DVD or if not just audio?</p>	<p>If an appropriate alternative is not available at the chosen venue, you could discuss other venue options with your client.</p> <p>You could discuss the possibility of a very small service for immediate family at the crematorium, followed by a larger gathering for a service at a later date when the risks of spreading the virus are lower.</p>

6. Views and requirements of client/family	Is the family open to options such as webcasting or a small funeral with a larger service to follow at a later date?	Even if you assess that there is only a medium to low risk of spreading the virus, if the family is happy to consider lower-risk alternatives such as webcasting the service and reducing the number of physical attendees, this will help safeguard your staff and the wider population.
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Useful links:

Up to date government advice: <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

Social distancing guidelines: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

Local resilience forums: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-resilience-forums-contact-details>

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March 18th 2019