



Guidance for Funeral Homes and Funeral Directors Updated January 5, 2021

Governor Raimondo and the Director of Health, Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, include calling hours, wakes, funerals (inside and outside), graveside services, and burials as settings that must comply with current COVID-19 Executive Orders and guidance's. Funeral directors should recommend that end-of-life services be scheduled for a later time so any ceremonies or memorials that take place are as safe as possible.

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) recommends that funeral home staff should continue to follow universal precautions for all decedent care as COVID status may be unknown at the time of death.

Calling hours/Wakes

- Calling hours and wakes are not allowed at funeral homes or houses of worship.
- Final viewings are for immediate family members only (spouse, parents, siblings, children, grandparents) and must occur one household at a time.

Funeral/Memorial Services/Celebrations of Life

- Funerals, memorial services, and celebrations of life are not allowed at funeral homes
- Funerals, memorial services, and celebration of life ceremonies are allowed to take place at a house of worship. Volume is limited to 25% of standard capacity, with a maximum of 125 people. People must be able to maintain physical distance when seated - i.e., minimum of six feet of physical distance between groups of people from different households. All people must stay six feet away from each other and wear masks. Anyone who is sick or has symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend.
- Auxiliary staff/officiants, including pall bearers, clergy, funeral director, honor guards, bag piper, bugler, and organist are included in the capacity limit. Individuals from out of state can attend the funeral and must comply with [Rhode Island's guidance for residents and visitors](#).

Services Held Outside or at Graveside

- No more than 15 people can attend an outdoor gravesite service.
- All people must stay six feet away from each other and wear a mask. Anyone who is sick or has symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend.
- Auxiliary staff/officiants, including pall bearers, clergy, funeral director, honor guards, bag piper, bugler, and organist are not included in the capacity limit; however, auxiliary staff/officiants must remain 12 feet away from mourners and wear a cloth face covering that covers their mouth and nose. Pall bearers should return to their vehicles once the casket is positioned at the gravesite unless they are part of the 15 funeral attendees.
- American flags that are draped over the casket can be folded and given to the funeral director after the attendees have returned to their cars. The funeral director will present the flag to the family at a later time.
- Individuals from out of state can attend the funeral and must comply with [Rhode Island's guidance for residents and visitors](#).

Embalming

- According to CDC guidance, embalming is allowed as long as funeral home staff uses appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Individual funeral homes can decide whether they will provide embalming services given the state's PPE shortages.
- [Guidance for Decedent Care](#) is available on OSHA's website and CDC has [guidance for embalming](#) on their website.

Cremation

- There are no regulations related to where cremains can be stored. Where the cremains are stored is a decision to be made by the decedent's next-of-kin or legal representative.
- The usual policies and procedures for releasing cremains are still in effect.
- No ceremonies are allowed to take place at the time of cremation

Body Storage

- Funeral homes can hold decedents in cold storage or embalm decedents and store on site in non-refrigerated storage (depending on the funeral home's capabilities and as space permits) until the cemetery has availability for burial.

Decedent Removal from Nursing Homes

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the protocol for removing decedents from nursing homes has changed.

- Nursing homes will identify one single location for retrieval of decedents in their building.
- Livery services should be informed by each respective facility to arrive at the pre-designated location to retrieve a decedent. The nursing home **must** disclose to the livery personnel if the decedent was COVID-19 positive or if COVID-19 was suspected. If the residence/facility does not have a transport table/gurney, they may request to use the livery service gurney.
- Prior to the arrival of the livery service, the nursing home staff will place the decedent in a body bag. In order to ensure that the decedent is correctly identified, they must have a bracelet or toe tag on their body identifying them, and a tag must also be placed on the outside of the body bag.
- As nursing homes continue to get PPE from the RIDOH warehouse, they will also be given a supply of body bags. Included in the box of body bags are toe tags and tags for the outside of the bag.
- Per CDC instructions, once bagged, the body bags of decedents who were COVID-19 positive or suspected to have COVID-19 must be wiped down with an EPA-approved disinfectant.
- The nursing home staff will transport the decedent to the pre-designated location for pick up by livery personnel. If appropriate, given the physical layout within the nursing home, the facility staff may transport the decedent to the pre-designated location just prior to the arrival of the livery.

Decedent removal from a hospice facility (does not apply to home hospice)

- Hospice facility is to follow the decedent removal protocol for nursing homes.

Decedent removal from home hospice

- The home hospice provider **must** disclose to the livery service or funeral home personnel who come to retrieve the decedent if the decedent was COVID-19 positive or if COVID-19 was suspected.

Decedent Removal from Assisted Living Residences (ALR)

- The ALR **must** disclose to the livery service or funeral home personnel who come to retrieve the resident if the decedent was COVID-19 positive or if COVID-19 was suspected.
- The ALR staff must create a clear path where the livery service or funeral home personnel will travel from the point of entering the building to the decedent's room without encountering other residents.

Decedent Removal from Hospital Morgues

- Hospital morgues are not required by RIDOH to inform funeral home livery of a decedent's COVID status. In some cases, a decedent's positive COVID status may not be known until sometime after death.

Any funeral home or funeral home staff found to be violating these directives may be subject to regulatory action on a license.