



COVID-19 in First Nations Communities: Funeral Services

COVID-19 has changed many of our traditional ways of doing things. We are now faced with having to adapt to this new way of doing things. It can be very difficult especially when saying goodbye to a loved one. Usually, we gather to pay our respects to a family or community member who has passed. We cannot do that right now and won't be able to for awhile. While we understand that funerals are a way for family, friends and community members to support one another through the process of putting a loved one to rest, we must also be mindful of not spreading COVID-19.

On April 2, 2020, the Government of Yukon put in place a law that prevents us from gathering with 10 or more people. This means that we need to find new ways to show our respect, love and support that doesn't put our loved ones and community members at risk.

We can find new ways of paying our respects to those we have lost by working together with our funeral service providers, spiritual leaders, church or faith leaders. The following are some suggestions to help you through this difficult time:

- A private service for immediate family now and public memorial service later when concerns about Covid-19 have passed;
- Broadcasting the wake or funeral service on [Facebook Live](#) or other [social media platform](#) so people can participate from their homes;
- Staying in parked vehicles along the road where a funeral procession will pass or following a funeral procession but not getting out of the vehicle at the cemetery;
- Sharing memories, prayers, songs and/or other support with the family of the person who has passed via phone, social media or other virtual platform;
- Come and go viewing with door management to keep the number of people within the viewing space to less than 10 at all times and following Yukon's **6 Steps to Staying Safe**;
- Donating food or items to the family of the person who has passed, if able.
- Taking "[collection](#)" through e-transfer or "go fund me"

We must remember to maintain the **6 Steps to Staying Safe**:

1. Keep 2 meters (6 feet) away from everyone who is not a member of your household
2. Wash your hands frequently or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
3. Stay home if you are feeling sick
4. Don't gather in groups of more than 10 people
5. Avoid unnecessary travel to rural communities
6. Self-isolate if you've just returned to the territory or if you've been in contact with some diagnosed with COVID-19.



Frequently Asked Questions

What if people want to go ahead with a funeral?

- If a funeral is held, it needs to be organized so that there is hardly a risk of spreading the virus.
- This means not having self-serve buffets, people not sharing food or drinks, maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet), not shaking hands, or hugging) and not having more than 10 people at a time.

If someone does have a funeral, can they have pallbearers?

- If there are pallbearers, proper physical distancing (at least 2 metres - 6 feet) must be maintained. We could reduce the number of pallbearers to four if it's possible. You could also consider doing the ceremony at the graveside and ask the Funeral Home to move the casket for the family.

What happens if the person died of COVID-19?

- We have been very fortunate that to date all COVID-19 cases recovered at home. Directions have been provided on how to protect everyone if that should happen.

What about if someone dies at home?

- In communities, bodies may be kept in family homes immediately following death. If untouched, these bodies don't put others at risk.
- In some cases, the body may be moved by community members when funeral service personnel are not available. Direct contact should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. More detailed information is available through the [Government of Canada](#). Contact your local [FN specific information] or the Health Centre at [community number] for more information.
- It is recommended that a 2 metre distance be respected for those observing the preparation of the body. If the deceased was not suspected to have COVID-19, and was not at a [high risk of exposure](#) to COVID-19, these extra precautions are not necessary.

What about other religions and ethnic groups?

- We, as Yukon First Nations, all have our traditions and ways of dealing with the passing of a loved one. Most of us have specific ways about how we approach death and funerals. These needs should be respected as much as possible while ensuring the health and safety of the community.



Suggestions or “How to...”

Raise Funds

Often families receive funds from the community to support the funeral and to transition our loved ones to the spirit world. Consider asking a family member to help you with receiving those funds through e-transfers (online banking) or by setting up a [Go Fund Me](#) campaign.

How do I “Go Live” on Facebook?

It’s easy to go Live from your personal Facebook Account. You do need a reliable connection to the internet. Be mindful that connecting through cellular data could be expensive. Try to connect to wi-fi if possible for live streaming.

- Follow the step-by-step instructions for going Live by Facebook [here](#).

Consider creating a Facebook Group that you can invite people to prior to the funeral service. Creating a Facebook Group means that an extended gathering of people can come together who aren’t necessarily “friends” with you on Facebook. Creating a Public Facebook Group for the funeral means that you can ask friends and family members who aren’t at the event to help you organize the livestream and reach people who may want to attend the funeral service who aren’t part of your personal Facebook network.

- Instructions for How to go live in a Facebook Group are [here](#).
- Instructions for creating a Facebook Group are [here](#).

How do I livestream on YouTube?

The benefit of YouTube is that it is broadly accessible (you don’t need an account to access the livestream. To begin, you’ll need to ensure that your user account is ‘public’ so that people who want to view the service can find your account. If you haven’t livestreamed using YouTube before, YouTube advises that you practice at least once before the event (at least 24 hours before) to ensure your account is working. Instructions for how to livestream using YouTube are [here](#).

Further Information

[Practical Guidance for Funerals, Wakes or Memorials During the Current Covid-19 Pandemic Situation](#) from Indigenous Services Canada, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch

[Interim Guidance: Death care services and handling of dead bodies during the coronavirus disease pandemic](#) from the Government of Canada

[Infection Prevention and Control for the safe management of a dead body in the context of Covid-19](#) from the World Health Organization