



Standards for Funerals and Burials of COVID-19 cases

Version 3.0

Effective from 18th February 2022

The following standards are issued under the Public Health Act Chapter 465 of the Laws of Malta and require strict adherence. Failure to adhere to these standards will result in enforcement procedures, as provided by the Act and the subsidiary legislation.

These standards apply ONLY to Funerals and Burials of COVID-19 cases as determined by the Superintendent of Public Health. Funerals and Burials of COVID-19 cases shall take place no later than 48 hours from the date and time of death as stated in the death certificate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been leaving a mark on the world, with a great toll on health, economies, and society in general. Consistent use of a variety of public health measures have helped to control the pandemic. The drive for vaccination with booster along with the non-pharmaceutical measures in place, are crucial to control and retain a stable situation and prevent acute hospitalisations, ITU admissions and COVID-related deaths.

Funerals and burials are expected to ensure that the deceased and their loved ones are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect and that people who come into contact with the deceased or who work in services providing care for the deceased are protected from infection. Those handling bodies of the deceased should be aware that there is likely to be a continuing risk of infection from body fluids and tissues where there is COVID-19 infection. Although the risk of infectious transmission is lower than for living patients, action should be taken to mitigate that risk. Funerals and burials must minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 through reasonable and practical measures to mitigate risk.

Standards for Funerals

All funerals shall be held in accordance with the following standards:

- All participants shall wear a face mask, covering nose, mouth and chin, throughout the duration of the ceremony.
- All participants shall respect social distancing rules at all times.
- All participants shall apply strict personal hygiene practices, including the use of an appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub as and when required.



- The hearse and family members are to be at the mortuary not earlier than half an hour prior departure time from mortuary. For the prayers before leaving from the Mortuary building, the number of those present should be limited to respect social distancing rules.
- No outside covering of coffins and no other PPE's except for masks shall be used to handle coffins released for burial from the mortuary.
- For those attending a funeral at a place of worship, the standards and guidance for places of worship and services apply, including provisions of social distancing and wearing of masks.
- People who are unwell or have COVID-19 symptoms should not attend the ceremony and remain in self-isolation at their home.
- Those in mandatory isolation/quarantine are not allowed to attend the ceremony.
- Singers and musicians shall maintain a distance of at least two (2) metres due to the generation and emission of respiratory droplets of various sizes that occurs during singing/playing of musical instruments.
- Singers shall adhere to the Standards for choirs issued by the Public Health authorities.
- Musicians shall adhere to the Standards for musicians and orchestras issued by the Public Health authorities and shall wear a mask at all times except when playing an instrument that cannot be played while wearing a mask.
- Funeral director is to keep a log of all drivers, pall bearers and the contact details of all persons transported.
- Memorial cards are to be distributed only by a limited number of persons, with sanitisation of hands prior to handling.
- Immediate family/next of kin of the deceased are to proceed directly to cemetery following the service; although understandably a difficult and emotional time, close physical contact should be avoided.

Standards for Burials

All burials shall be held in accordance with the following standards:

- All participants shall wear a face mask, covering nose, mouth and chin, throughout the duration of the burial service.
- All participants shall respect social distancing rules at all times.
- All participants shall apply strict personal hygiene practices, including the use of an appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub as and when required.



- Copies of burial permits and cause of death are to be referred to the family member/s by email where possible.
- Following burial of the body of a COVID-19 case, the grave can be safely opened and cleaned after the lapse of 5 years from the date of burial.

Care after death and preparing the body of a COVID-19 case for transport

This section refers to the preparation of the body after death and before transport. Personnel who are in close contact with the body should always apply infection control measures including proper hand hygiene both before and after close contact with the body, and proper use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPEs) such as face shields/goggles, medical masks, gowns and gloves. The PPE to be used is based on the risk profile of the individual.

Before transportation of the body:

- All tubes, drains, catheters and any other indwelling devices should be removed.
- Trained medical staff should make sure that any leaking body fluids are contained.
- Handling of the body should be kept to the minimum time possible.
- The body should never be disinfected.
- The body is placed in a body bag and transferred to the mortuary as quickly as possible. No special transportation equipment is required for the transfer of the body.

Storage and preparation of body before burial

- No preparation of the body (i.e., washing the body, tidying/shaving hair, cosmetic services, or trimming nails) or embalming is to take place, so that excessive manipulation of the body is avoided.
- Shrouding and preparation of the body for funeral can be achieved by performing standard infection control procedures, by using biodegradable body bags as per mortuary protocol, and by wearing appropriate PPE to prevent transmission via direct contact. Such PPE include gloves and long-sleeved water-resistant gown.
- In the case of COVID-19 related deaths, viewing of the body is not permitted.



- Cleaning of mortuary environmental surfaces is essential, with the mortuary being always kept clean and properly ventilated. Environmental surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water or disinfectant solution. After cleaning the surfaces, a disinfectant with a minimum concentration of 0.1% sodium hypochlorite (bleach) or 70% alcohol is placed on the surface for a minimum of 1 minute.
- Appropriate PPE should be worn during the cleaning and disinfecting processes. Clinical waste must be handled and disposed of properly as infectious waste.
- No other external coverings of the coffin and no other PPEs (gowns, goggles, gloves, etc.) except for face masks are needed for transfer once the body is inside a closed coffin and the coffin has been sanitised and released for burial.