



TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION UNIFIED COMMAND

GUIDELINES: WAKES/FUNERALS

The Tohono O'odham Unified Command will be working with the Tohono O'odham Nation Health Care, and Districts to support Nation members that are planning for wake and funeral arrangements for their loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. It may be difficult for people to make decisions about how to safely grieve and honor their loved one. This guidance is for individuals and families as they work with funeral directors, community and religious leaders, and others to plan and hold funeral services and visitations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the continued effort to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 on the Tohono O'odham Nation, changes need to be made to the way funerals, visitations, and memorials to the deceased are held.

This guidance provides strategies to protect yourself and others when you are grieving the loss of a loved one, supporting each other, making funeral arrangements, and participating in funeral services and visitations.

The following resources and information will be made available for families:

- Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE): Families will be provided 25 masks and one box of gloves to provide for individuals attending services.
- Hand Sanitizer Dispensing station (2 stations per requesting family); we are requesting that these dispensing stations be returned to the District Office they were borrowed from, after services are complete, so that the equipment can be made available for another family if needed.
- Tohono O'odham Nation Guidelines for Wakes and Funerals.
- List of Funeral Homes the Tohono O'odham Nation works with.



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The following guidelines are offered to assist in the planning of wakes and funerals on the Tohono O'odham Nation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Risk of Transmission

The risks for the spread of COVID-19 being presented are those associated with person-to-person transmission through mucus or saliva droplets (like from a coughing person) or those droplets left on exposed surfaces. There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room at a funeral or visitation service with the body of someone who died of COVID-19. These considerations should be examined regardless of the person's cause of death.

People who have died from COVID-19 can be buried or cremated without creating additional risk to the living or the environment. The casket can be buried in the community at the same depth, distance from other graves, and markers as any other deceased. A person should avoid touching the body of someone who has died of COVID-19. The main risk at funerals and wakes comes from people who might be infected with COVID-19 and may transmit the virus unknowingly. Taking precautions outlined below can help keep loved ones healthy and reduce the risk of transmission during funerals and wakes.

Considerations for Tribal Leaders and Community Members

Below are points to consider when planning for a burial or funeral. These points should be exercised before, during, and after all ceremonies and associated activities (including but not limited to receptions, wakes, rosaries, feasts, burials, graveyard services, memorials, vigils, family visits, and viewings). Please consult with cultural, spiritual, and religious leaders, as well as elected leaders and family members to plan what is safe, possible, and acceptable to exercise. **Tribal Leaders and Community Members should also encourage wakes and services be limited to one-day services.**

CDC Guidance for Funeral and Burial Services

- Educate community about who is at higher risk of getting very sick, such as elders and those with diabetes and serious heart or lung conditions.
- Limit the number of people at a gathering to 10 or fewer.
- Clean and disinfect the location where activities are held, both before they begin and after they conclude; designate times for such cleaning if the ceremony continues over a period of time or if multiple groups participate sequentially.
- Provide plenty of hand washing sinks with soap and water or ensure hand sanitizer is available.
- People who are sick should remain at home and not engage in burial and funeral practices.



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CDC Guidance for Funeral and Burial Services (Continued)

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Practice social/physical distancing by planning for and maintaining at least 6 feet of distance between people.
- After any contact with a body of a person who has passed away from COVID-19, a person should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Additional Considerations

- CDC recommends, anyone assisting in preparing the body of a person that passed away from COVID-19, should wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect face, body and eyes from potential exposure. Afterwards, these people should properly wash their hands, properly dispose of gloves, wash their clothes (if no protective gowns were used), and disinfect the area and equipment used. Note: the contracted funeral homes are not allowing families to have contact with the body at this time.
- Maintaining healthy physical distance during funeral and burial ceremonies means that physical contact such as handshakes, hugging, and kissing should be avoided or limited. Consider alternative ways to greet someone.
- Because children often struggle with maintaining physical distancing requirements, consider requesting that children not attend funeral and burial ceremonies and associated activities.
- Those living in other areas should consider not traveling to another community to attend a funeral, burial ceremony, or associated activities.
- To safeguard the health of family members as well as traditional practitioners, spiritual or religious leaders, a minimum number of people should be involved in preparations. Others can observe without touching the body and stay at a safe distance.
- Those tasked with transporting a body, carrying a casket, placing the body in the grave should make sure that the body is properly protected, should wear proper PPE, and wash hands with soap and water immediately after such activities are completed. As food plays a critical role in many of our funeral, burial ceremonies, and associated activities, special attention should be paid to the safe handling, preparation, serving, transporting, sharing, and consumption of food. In addition to being mindful of how and by whom food is prepared, consider limiting the number of people involved in handling any food. Consider having people take their food to go.



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Additional Considerations (Continued)

- As food plays a critical role in many of our funeral, burial ceremonies, and associated activities, special attention should be paid to the safe handling, preparation, serving, transporting, sharing, and consumption of food. In addition to being mindful of how and by whom food is prepared, consider limiting the number of people involved in handling any food. Consider having people take their food to go.
- Be cognizant of these considerations if you are hosting any ceremonies or receiving community members in your home or on your property. This includes assuring that seating for all attendees meets physical distancing requirements.
- Consider notifying those in attendance of a funeral, burial ceremony, or associated activity of the risks of COVID-19.
- Consider having those in attendance, who are able to, wear a cloth face mask.
- Have everyone wash or sanitize their hands before and after the service.
- Consider adding a safety statement on the funeral flyer. The family of the deceased is responsible for the funeral flyer.
 - *Sample statement: In a continued effort to maintain the safety for everyone and to help stop the spread of COVID-19, we will be taking the necessary precautions and adhering to the CDC requirements for social distancing throughout the funeral service. Everyone is encouraged to wear a face mask or covering. Thank you.*
- If a family was exposed to the COVID-19 positive person who has passed, all families members will need to quarantine until cleared by Public Health. Coordinate all funeral arrangements by phone until the quarantine period is completed.
- Consider having a sign-in sheet for those in attendance. If an individual should test positive for COVID-19 this could assist with contact tracing efforts.



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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can you get COVID-19 from a dead person?

A: Persons who die from COVID-19 are most infectious before death when they are sick and coughing. Caregivers who are exposed can easily get infected and should follow precautions of isolation and quarantine. After a person dies and their remains are placed in a sealed casket or urn, the outside should be cleaned and disinfected. The cleaned casket or urn is not considered contagious.

Q: Can you bury a person with COVID-19 in the local cemetery?

A: Yes. Burials should follow local standard policies. Sealed caskets and urns do not pose any additional hazard for spread of virus through the air or soil.

Q: Can you still have a viewing for a deceased person?

A: Viewing or being in a room with the deceased person is not an easy way to spread COVID-19. The risk of contagion is higher with touching the deceased person and surfaces that others touch.

Q: Can we wash and dress our deceased loved one?

A: The risk of infection is higher with direct contact. Strict and frequent hand washing, wearing a mask, minimizing the number of people who come in contact, avoiding splashes, can decrease the chance of infection. Cleaning and disinfecting the area with products approved for COVID-19 or bleach (1/4 cup bleach and 2¼ cups of water) will reduce the amount of virus on surfaces. Some funeral homes will assist families with washing and dressing their loved one in a safer setting.

Q: Why are we limited to 10 people at a funeral?

A: It is easier to handle smaller groups to provide service, attend to needs, provide hand washing areas or sanitizer, masks, and prevent spread. In general, the smaller the number of people who gather, the lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 and other diseases.

Q: If I am a close relative, but I am sick, can I attend?

A: Saying goodbye and closure is very important. Invite family and friends who cannot attend due to illness or who have serious medical conditions to share their wishes in different ways using cards, video, poems, or telephone to lessen the chance of spreading illness. People with diabetes, cancer, obesity, dialysis, lung or heart disease should consider not attending.

Q: What if I touch someone who I think has COVID-19?

A: Washing our hands frequently with soap and water is best. COVID-19 is not spread through the skin, but infects people when the virus enters through the nose, mouth or eyes from the air or our own hands. Bring hand sanitizer with you when you go out. You can also make a set of paper towels soaked in bleach water (see above) stored in a zip lock bag to bring with you. Persons who get direct exposure to COVID-19 can call their provider to learn more and ask if they should be tested.



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PUBLIC NOTICE

THE FOLLOWING BURIAL ASSISTANCE VENDORS WILL PROVIDE BURIAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES FOR THE TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION FOR FY20 beginning October 01, 2019.

J. WARREN FUNERAL SERVICES
LOCATED IN CASA GRANDE, ARIZONA

ADAIR FUNERAL HOME
LOCATED IN TUCSON, ARIZONA

Please contact the Family Assistance Division of the Health and Human Service Department with any questions regarding this Notice 520 383-6250.