



# TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION UNIFIED COMMAND

## ***GUIDELINES: WAKES/FUNERALS***

The Tohono O'odham Unified Command continues to work with partners in order to provide guidance for Nation members that are planning wake, funeral, and memorial arrangements for their loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic adds additional difficulty with making decisions on how to properly honor a deceased individual but it is important that all final arrangements be made with COVID Safety at the forefront.

This guidance is intended to provide individuals/families with wake, funeral, and memorial services requirements as they work with funeral directors, community and religious leaders, and others to plan and these types of services and arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the summer COVID-19 surge we were faced with clusters of COVID-19 cases resulting from wake, funeral, and memorial services. The mitigation requirements are intended to protect yourself and others when you are grieving the loss of a loved one, supporting each other, making funeral arrangements, and attending services.

In a continued effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 on the Tohono O'odham Nation, aggressive changes need to be made to the way wakes, funerals, and memorials for the deceased are held.

The following resources are required for individuals and families overseeing final arrangements for the deceased:

- **Required:** Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE), any individual(s) attending wakes, funerals, and memorials will adhere to E.O. 2020-09 requirement for masks and or face coverings. Protective gloves are optional but not required.
- **Required:** Hand washing stations and or hand sanitizer readily available.
- **Required:** Individuals/families overseeing final arrangements will adhere to physical distancing (6 feet) of attendees.
- **Required:** NO FEEDING WILL BE PERMITTED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, reference E.O 2020-09
- **Required:** Wake, Funeral, Memorial services will be completed in no more than six (6) hours during daylight hours, between sunrise and sunset.
- **Required:** Individuals/families overseeing final arrangements will be required to develop a sign-in sheet of attendees in the event that TON-HC needs to conduct contact tracing and investigation.

Additional information included within this document:

- 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 memorials, wakes, and funerals on the Tohono O'odham Nation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

### **Requirements and key considerations for Tribal Leaders and Community Members**

Below are COVID-19 mitigation strategy requirements and points to consider when planning for a burial or funeral. These requirements and considerations should be exercised before, during, and after all ceremonies and associated activities (including but not limited to wakes, 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 be advised that ALL services be limited to one-day services, during daylight hours.

### **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.

### **CDC Guidance for Funeral and Burial Services**

Help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 by following these **Guiding Principles**:

- The more people interact, the closer in distance the interaction is (less than 6 feet), and the longer the interaction lasts, the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- The higher the level of community transmission in an area, the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Masks help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19, particularly if social distancing cannot be maintained.
- During an in-person gathering, convene in outdoors or in well-ventilated areas, if possible, rather than poorly ventilated, indoor areas to help lower risk of spreading COVID-19. Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings.
- Avoid sharing commonly used objects such as religious aids (e.g., religious books, collection plates, programs, etc.) to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.



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- Reducing the number of people who are engaged in activities like singing or chanting as these behaviors can increase the amount of respiratory virus in the air.
- Practice increased hand hygiene, and cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces and objects to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- Practice social distancing by maintaining at least 6 feet between attendees; facility or lay staff; and clergy or officiants, especially when small, in-person services are held.
- Take extra precautions for those at increased risk for COVID-19, particularly those who are older or have pre-existing conditions, to help lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.

The risk of COVID-19 spreading at gatherings and services is ranked as follows, from lowest to highest:

**Lowest risk:** Virtual-only services and gatherings.

**Lower risk:** Smaller outdoor, time-limited, in-person services and gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear masks, do not share objects, no feeding and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).

**Higher risk:** Medium-sized in-person services and gatherings, either indoors or outdoors, adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, with some individuals wearing face masks and with some attendees coming from outside the local area. Sharing of items or objects is limited.

**Highest risk:** Large in-person services and gatherings held indoors and where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart; many attendees travel from outside the local area. Few individuals wear masks and objects are shared.

In some situations, many people have become sick with COVID-19 after attending a funeral service. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in communities, 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. Some examples include:

- Using technology to connect virtually with family and friends during the grieving process.
- Adherence to the modified funeral arrangements, such as limiting attendance at funerals held during shortly after the time of death to a small number of immediate family members and friends; and then holding additional memorial services when social distancing guidelines are less restrictive.
- Practicing physical distancing by maintaining at least 6 feet between attendees, facility staff, and clergy or officiants when small, in-person services are held.
- Considering modifications to funeral rites and rituals (for example, avoid touching the deceased person's body or personal belongings or other ceremonial objects) to make sure of everyone's safety.





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- Wearing masks while around others and outside of your home.
- 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.

### Additional Considerations

Discuss options for making changes to traditional funeral plans - Discuss your cultural or religious traditions and the funeral wishes of the deceased, if applicable, with family members and the people you are working with (funeral home staff, clergy, or officiants).

- Identify any potential concerns in order to make changes to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Preserve traditional practices when it is possible to safely do so.

Holding funeral services and visitations - Familial and cultural expectations might put pressure on you and others to participate in or hold or schedule funeral services and visitations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, those expectations may need to be relaxed to protect the safety of those who would have participated. **People continue to [get exposed to COVID-19 at funeral services](#); the people giving it to others were not feeling sick at the time and did not know they were carrying or spreading COVID-19.**

For the sake of you and your loved ones, limit the attendees to a small number of immediate family and close friends - Those who are sick, have a household member or other close contact who is sick. Those who have [higher risk of severe illness](#) should weigh the benefits of in-person attendance against risk of exposure to a person with COVID-19, especially if recommendations for wearing masks and social distancing may be difficult to follow for themselves or others. Because children often struggle with maintaining physical distancing requirements, consider requesting that children not attend funeral and burial ceremonies and associated activities.

Avoid touching the deceased person's body before preparation - There are many different cultural traditions involved in the bereavement process, including some that involve touching the deceased person's body before preparation. Though we are still learning more about how COVID-19 spreads, it may be possible that you could get COVID-19 by touching the body of a deceased person who had confirmed or suspected COVID-19 prior to the body being prepared for viewing. After the body has been prepared for viewing, there may be less of a chance of the virus spreading from certain types of touching, such as holding the hand or hugging.

Take precautions with rituals that involve touching the deceased person's body - If the deceased person had confirmed or suspected COVID-19, avoid kissing, washing, or shrouding the body before, during, and after the body has been prepared, if possible. Take precautions if participating in these activities is part of important religious or cultural practices. Note: the contracted funeral homes are not allowing families to have contact with the body at this time.



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Safely gather your loved one's belongings - If desired, you may retrieve the belongings of a loved one who has died of COVID-19. You should use gloves and practice good hand hygiene when handling your loved ones' belongings. Depending on the type of belongings, such as electronics, you should also follow the [household item-specific cleaning and disinfection guidelines](#) when handling these items.

Those living in other areas should consider not traveling to another community to attend a funeral, burial ceremony, or associated activities.

Consider adding a safety statement on the funeral flyer. Individuals/family of the deceased responsible for creating the funeral flyer. Can include the following 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.

Individuals/families that host or sponsor a memorial, wake, and or funeral will be required to have 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 handwashing, 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:** For most gatherings, it is easier to handle smaller groups to provide service, attend to needs, provide handwashing areas or sanitizer, masks, and prevent spread. In general, the smaller the number of people who gather, there is a 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 because they are sick or have serious medical conditions to share their wishes in different ways using cards, video, poems, or telephone if they are sick 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 FOR THE TOHONO O'ODHAM  
NATION FOR FY21 beginning October 1, 2020 through  
September 30, 2021.

**MARCUS FUNERAL CARE LLC**

304 E. Vamori St., Tucson, Arizona 85756

Tele: (520) 294-4732

**ANGELS IN WAITING**

112 N. Sacaton Street, Casa Grande, Arizona 85122

Tele: (520) 836-8300

**ADAIR FUNERAL HOME**

1050 N. Dodge Boulevard, Tucson, Arizona 85716

Tele: (520) 326-4343

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
FAMILY ASSISTANCE DIVISION

Office: (520) 383-6250

Cell: (520) 993-6746