



# A Guide for Health Professionals – Funerals and Sorry Business during the coronavirus pandemic

This document is subject to change and will be updated as required.

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“ **Funerals can have up to 20 people for funerals being conducted indoors. Funerals conducted outdoors can have up to 30 people**

To help prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Government of Australia has introduced new measures restricting large indoor and outdoor public gatherings. This ruling will significantly impact how Aboriginal people gather for funerals and Sorry Business.

As of Monday 18 May 2020, funerals can have up to 20 attendees for funerals being conducted indoors. Funerals conducted outdoors can have up to 30 attendees. In both cases, the number does not include the person/s necessary to conduct the service e.g. funeral director. The prohibited gathering rules which require at least 4 square metres per person, still apply.

To obtain approval for more people to attend a funeral, a request must be sent as early as possible to [funeral.exemption@dlgsc.wa.gov.au](mailto:funeral.exemption@dlgsc.wa.gov.au)

Travel restrictions are still in place across Western Australia, which means Aboriginal people may not be able to travel to attend funerals and Sorry Business without an approved exemption for compassionate reasons\*.

For more information about the easing of travel restrictions please visit <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/covid-19-coronavirus-regional-travel-restrictions>

\* Compassionate reasons include death of a member of the person's **immediate** family or household.

It is more important at the moment during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep Elders, others who are already ill and our community safe.

Our culture and family connections have kept us strong for many years. In these difficult times we need to continue to be strong by keeping in touch with family and practising cultural activities within our household.

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“ **Sorry Business and other cultural activities are very important to our mob.**

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The restrictions will not be forever, they are just temporary, so we can help stop the spread of COVID-19 in our families and our community.

## Talk to your mob

Talk about different ways to hold the service and burial while restrictions are in place. This may even include considering very difficult options such as:

- restricting funerals and services to immediate family, while keeping in line with number restrictions mentioned above
- splitting attendance, where some members of the family attend the service and others attend the burial



- holding only a small funeral – with memorials, processions and tombstone openings for the wider family and community to be held later
- using audio-visual technology to allow those not at the funeral to be ‘present’.

## Other ways to support families during Sorry Business

Saying goodbye to a loved one when they pass away is important.

If you cannot be there during this time, there are ways you can still support families including:

- sending video messages of condolence to family and screen them at the funeral if that is possible
- holding your own memorial service at home for members of your household
- providing copies of funeral programs and/or eulogies
- using video technology to view the service from your home
  - If you are using technology to grieve we encourage you to do it in a culturally safe way around your family group that lives in your home.

## Body viewing

Family members should be allowed to view the body and standard precautions should be observed.

Family members are advised **NOT** to kiss or touch the deceased.

## Advice for preparation and funeral practices

For more information regarding preparation and funeral practices please visit the guide below for the most up to date advice.

[health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-funeral-directors](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-funeral-directors)

## Social distancing and personal hygiene

### Cover coughs and sneezes – wash hands often – stay home if unwell

Like at any public gathering, there is potential for the transmission of viruses between those attending a funeral.

People attending funerals must stay 1.5 metres away from others, and no touching or kissing others will help stop the spread of viruses. People must sneeze or cough into their elbow, dispose of used tissues in a bin and wash hands often. If unwell, don't attend the funeral.

Visit the **HealthyWA** website for more advice on Good Hygiene and Social Distancing.

### Help is available

These restrictions for funerals and Sorry Business and the impacts of COVID-19 can be distressing for our community. If you or someone you care about is feeling distressed, call **beyondblue** on **1300 224 636** for free telephone counselling or call **Lifeline** in a mental health crisis on **13 11 14**.

### For more information

Visit the **HealthyWA** website for up-to-date COVID-19 health information and advice at [healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus](https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus) or call the Western Australian enquiry line on **13 COVID (13 26843)**.

For Aboriginal resources go to: [healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A\\_E/Coronavirus/Coronavirus-information-for-Aboriginal-people](https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Coronavirus/Coronavirus-information-for-Aboriginal-people)