



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

This update is based on Phase 4 of the COVID-19 WA roadmap allowing easing of restrictions by the WA Government as of 11.59pm Friday 26 June 2020.

“ **The 2 square metre rule is still in place within WA as transmission of the virus is still possible.** ”

Western Australia’s restrictions will be relaxed even further due to the continued low number of COVID-19 cases and WA’s hard border with the rest of the country.

Current health advice is that we can cautiously increase limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings while continuing to practise physical distancing and maintain good personal hygiene.

The 2 square metre rule is still in place within WA as transmission of the virus is still possible.

The size of the funeral venue or facility will still limit the number of people allowed to attend. Funerals must provide attendees with at least 2 square metres of floor space per person.

These public gathering restrictions exclude the staff and officials required to conduct the service. However, if there are more than 500 people at a funeral, then staff and officials are included in the 2 square metre rule.

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

## Regional travel restrictions

Travel is now permitted throughout all regions within Western Australia.

However, access to many remote Aboriginal communities’ remains restricted.

For more information on entering remote Aboriginal communities and exemptions please visit: <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/covid-19-coronavirus-remote-aboriginal-communities-restrictions-entering>

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-travel-advice>

## Sorry Business and other cultural activities are very important to our mob

With the easing of restrictions for public gatherings and venues, it is important to continue 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.



## Travelling to remote Aboriginal communities

While gathering number limits have been lifted, travel to many remote Aboriginal communities is still restricted. This means the needs of some families may still not be met. Family need to talk about different ways to hold the service and burial especially if the venue is not able to provide enough space for 2 square metres per person. This may even include considering very difficult options such as:

- restricting funerals and services to close family, while keeping in line with Phase 4 rule of 2 square metres per person at venues.
- splitting attendance, where some members of the family attend the service and others attend the burial.
- holding only a funeral within the restrictions – 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 a venue close to your home 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.

## 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)

## Physical distancing and personal hygiene

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

If unwell, don't attend the funeral.

Continue to practice good personal hygiene by sneezing or coughing into your elbow or a tissue, dispose of used tissues in a bin and wash hands often.

Stay 1.5 metres away from others at the funeral where possible.

Don't make unnecessary physical contact with others - avoid handshakes, hugs and kisses.

Visit the HealthyWA website for more advice on good hygiene and physical 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 (13 268 43)**.

For Aboriginal resources go to: [https://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)

