

COVID-19 Deaths, funerals and tangihanga: Information for families and whānau at Alert Level 2

27 August 2020

From 11.59 pm Sunday 30 August, all of New Zealand is at **Alert Level 2**. Gatherings, including funerals and tangihanga, are restricted to a maximum of 100 attendees except within the Auckland region (Auckland Council area) where gatherings may involve a maximum of ten (10) attendees at a time. However, funeral directors can register funerals or tangihanga to allow a maximum of 50 people to attend at a time.

Tangihanga, kawē/hari mate, hura kōhatu and marae – a need to adapt our practices during this unprecedented time.

At Alert Level 2, we must continue to maintain a high level of vigilance in order to protect ourselves and others and slow the spread of COVID-19.

Already, iwi and hapū have been adapting tikanga and kawa to keep our people safe. This has also extended to tangihanga.

The guidance for gatherings will be reviewed in the future. If any changes are made for funerals and tangihanga information will be available on the Ministry of Health [website](#).

If your loved one passes away in hospital

You may be able to view them at a safe distance before and after their death, but only if the hospital is allowing visitors. Remote viewing may be available via technology. You will not be permitted to touch, wash and/or dress your loved one's body at the hospital. The hospital will transfer your loved one to the mortuary, and then into your funeral director's care.

If your loved one passes away at home

Whānau and friends touching, washing and/or dressing your loved one's body poses a significant health risk and it is strongly advised against. The funeral director will transfer your loved one to their facilities. Funeral directors may allow religious rituals for the care of the body to occur. However, these must be carried out in the presence of an embalmer who will give direction to anyone present on the correct requirements. Activities such as kissing, washing or touching the body should be discouraged before, during and after any ritual.

If your loved one passes away overseas

People who die overseas can be repatriated to New Zealand provided the funeral director meets the international requirements. The funeral director will know what paperwork is required for customs and biosecurity.

Marae

Marae might choose to reopen at Alert Level 2. If they open, marae will need to implement a health and safety plan and other measures.

Tangihanga, kawehari mate, hura kōhatu

Bereaved families and whānau from all cultures and backgrounds will find this time challenging. This makes it even more important we show each other kindness and caring, manaakitanga and aroha.

We have followed a graduated approach to tangihanga - at **Alert Level 2 tangihanga, kawehari mate and hura kōhatu may resume subject to there being:**

- **No more than 100 people present (50 in the Auckland region) at any one time in a separate 'defined space' (indoors or outdoors)**
 - **workers such as kaikōrero, kaikaranga, members of the clergy and the funeral director are excluded from the person limit**
 - **a defined space is an indoor or outdoor space with walls or partitions (whether permanent or temporary) that substantively divide that space from other spaces, or an outdoor space where there is at least two metres between separate groups**
- **Provision for contact tracing records to be kept**

It is recommended all gatherings (indoor and outdoor) should be kept short (under two hours).

People who are sick with cold or flu-like symptoms should stay home and avoid gatherings and mixing with other people.

People at higher risk of illness from COVID-19 are encouraged to think about how attending gatherings can be done safely. This includes kaumātua, women who are more than 28 weeks pregnant, and whānau members who are immune-compromised or have cancer or pre-existing conditions such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory issues, kidney problems, diabetes or high blood pressure. More information for higher risk people can be found [here](#).

Contact tracing is an important element of our response to COVID-19. For all funerals and tangihanga, there needs to be systems and processes in place to support contact tracing should it be needed. Businesses or services, such as funeral directors must display an **official NZ COVID Tracer QR code**.

It is also required that funeral directors keep a register of all persons entering the funeral home for the purposes of any viewing or religious/cultural rituals which take place. This register should include:

- exact day and time the viewing took place
- full names of all viewing
- the viewer's current physical address, email address and mobile phone number.

If funeral directors or venue owners keep contact tracing records, they should be kept secure for two months and once they are two months old, they should be destroyed. The information in the register must only be used for the purpose of contact tracing and only shared with the Ministry of Health or district health boards, should this be required. More information can be found on the Ministry of Health website [here](#) on contact tracing.

Multiple groups of up to 100 manuhiri (50 within the Auckland region) are allowed to attend tangihanga. Again, there must be **no more than 100 people (50 within the Auckland region) present at any one time in a separate 'defined space', excluding kaikōrero, kaikaranga, members of the clergy and the funeral director.**

Each group of up to 100 people (50 within the Auckland region), will be considered as 'one cohort' with the expectation that they will not interact with any other cohort in or around the premises/venue or 'defined space'.

Personal hygiene practices should be followed, and frequently touched surfaces and objects should be thoroughly cleaned with disinfectant before and after each group comes in. Handwashing is encouraged, especially before and after laying items on the coffin.

Burial or nehunga and following

It is important that the **group who attends the tangihanga directly before the burial or nehunga must be the same group of up to 100 (50 within the Auckland region) that travels from the service with the tūpāpaku to the cemetery or urupā.**

This same group can be provided with food and refreshments following the burial or nehunga. It is recommended gatherings following the burial, nehunga and cremation are kept short (under two hours).

Travel

Travel between Alert Level 2 regions is permitted. You do not have to apply for an exemption to travel between Alert Level 2 regions to either transport a tūpāpaku or to attend a funeral, tangihanga, kawē/hari mate or hura kōhatu.

If you wish to bury tūpāpaku in a region they usually don't reside in, tūpāpaku can be transported between Alert Level 2 regions, using registered funeral directors or private transport in a safe way.

Honouring your loved one

You may engage the services of a priest, minister, celebrant, kaikōrero/kaikaranga or other to conduct karakia, poroporoakī, and mihi at the funeral home, marae and/or urupā. However, hygiene protocols should be followed.

You may choose to livestream your time at the marae, funeral home, private residence, cemetery and/or urupā to include whānau and friends who could not attend. Funeral directors may be able to assist you at the funeral home.

Once we recover from this pandemic, your whānau may want to come together to honour your loved one. If your whānau member was cremated, you may want to bury their ashes at a whānau urupā. If they were buried immediately, you may choose to hold a service at the burial grounds. These are only some of the ways you may choose to remember your lost loved one.

Getting support

We encourage whānau to use the services of their local 'kaiwhakarite', deceased loved one's health providers and Police iwi liaison officers.

Grieving is never easy. If you feel you are not coping, it is important to talk with a health professional. For support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing, you can call or text 1737 for free to talk with a trained counsellor. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Alert Level 2 – kua hīkina te rāhui, engari ka herea tonutia: Official guidelines for tangihanga

What to do when someone dies

Appoint a whānau member to potentially liaise with funeral directors, health providers and/or police

- Māori communities, iwi, hapū and whānau are being encouraged to establish local 'kaiwhakarite' or people who can assist whānau during this time as well. Get in touch with your iwi and hapū organisations, marae, local social services provider or local Civil Defence Emergency Management Centre to see if a 'kaiwhakarite' has already been established. You may wish to contact your 'kaiwhakarite' to seek advice.

Contact the deceased's health provider (GP, Hauora, PHO)

- **If your loved one has died from a known health issue**, this will be critical information for the funeral director – your loved one's health provider will liaise directly with the funeral director (once appointed) to pass on the necessary information.
- **If your loved one has died from COVID-19**, it will be critical for the health provider to support you with information on what to do next.
- **If your loved one has died from an unknown cause**, a post-mortem may need to be undertaken. Your health provider will assist you in the first instance and the Police may need to be contacted, who will then facilitate this process. They will liaise directly with your appointed whānau member.

Get in touch with a local funeral director

A registered funeral director should be engaged to carry out the functions of care and preparation of the deceased and may assist with transportation, burial or cremation and service arrangements.

If you are unsure about funeral directors, work with your local Police iwi liaison officer, 'kaiwhakarite', tribal authority, health provider and/or local Civil Defence Emergency Management Centre to identify someone suitable. Once you have secured the services of a funeral director, be prepared:

- If the funeral director encounters high levels of anxiety, distress or confrontational behaviour due to the restrictions we are all under, they will contact the local Police for assistance.
- **They may uplift your loved one wearing personal protective equipment (PPE)** including masks, gloves, protective clothing etc. – this may be daunting for whānau, especially young ones.
- Their preference is for **one appointed whānau member to facilitate arrangements** including paperwork – this may need to be done remotely or at least using physical distancing measures.
- **Whānau members are allowed to dress the tūpāpaku** – however this must be carried out in the presence of an embalmer/funeral director who will give direction to anyone present on the correct requirements. Activities such as hongī, kissing, washing or touching the body should not occur before, during or after the dressing and/or viewings.
- Multiple viewings, for kirimate, whānau-pani, whānau whānui or friends are allowed to take place under Alert Level 2 at funeral homes:

- **Only a maximum of up to 100 people (50 within the Auckland region) at any one time may view the tūpāpaku**, excluding kaikōrero, kaikaranga, members of the clergy, and the funeral director.
 - Each group of up to 100 people (50 within the Auckland region), will be considered as ‘one cohort’ with the expectation they will not interact with people in any other cohort in or around the premises/venue or ‘defined space’.
 - **Funeral directors/organisers of the ceremony must display an official NZ COVID Tracer QR code and keep a contact tracing register** with the details of all persons attending any part of the funeral process. If funeral directors or venue owners keep contact tracing records, they should be kept secure for two months and once they are two months old, they should be destroyed. The information in the register must only be used for the purpose of contact tracing and only shared with the Ministry of Health or district health boards, should this be required. Attendees should not have access to anyone else’s personal information.
 - Funeral directors will have health and safety plans including their requirements for hygiene etc. This should be shared with whānau as well as displayed clearly for people to view prior to entering the funeral home.
- **Tūpāpaku may be taken home to lie in state** if whānau wish to take them.
 - Whānau will need to think about this option carefully as personal hygiene, infection prevention, control measures and contact tracing measures must still be followed in keeping the kīrimate, whānau-pani and those visiting to pay their respects safe and healthy.
 - Whānau are strongly encouraged to come up with a plan to manage people movements, hygiene and infection prevention
- **Only a maximum of up to 100 people (50 within the Auckland region) will be allowed to go to the cemetery, urupā or crematorium** alongside the tūpāpaku.
 - This limit of up to 100 people (50 within the Auckland region) excludes kaikōrero, kaikaranga, members of the clergy, and the funeral director.
 - The group that attends the service directly before the burial or nehunga must be the same group of 100 (50 within the Auckland region) that travels from the service with the tūpāpaku to the cemetery or urupā.
 - Funeral directors will need to contact their local authorities to check if they have any restrictions or requirements in place for any public crematoria or cemeteries under their management.
 - Similarly, whānau will need to make contact with their marae/urupā contacts to check if they have any restrictions or requirements in place.
- Whānau should appoint someone to support funeral directors in ensuring messages around limits on attendance numbers, personal hygiene, infection prevention, control and contact tracing measures are understood and complied with.
 - **This does not preclude whānau from electing to have their loved one placed in storage (refrigerated) for later burial or cremation**, if this facility is available locally, until we are past the current Alert Level 2. You can discuss this option with the funeral director if you wish.
 - The gatherings guidance will be reviewed in the future and if anything changes for funerals and tangihanga this be available on the **Ministry of Health website**.
 - Funeral directors may have other restrictions in place depending on their own health and safety plans. They will let you know what these are.