

COVID-19 Deaths, funerals and tangihanga: Information for funeral directors at Alert Level 2

23 September 2020

At **Alert Level 2** gatherings, including funerals and tangihanga, are restricted to a maximum of 100 attendees.

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

As we have seen in New Zealand and overseas, gatherings present a very high risk for transmission of COVID-19. We must protect people's health and ensure our health system can look after people who become sick.

These guidelines apply for all deceased persons, regardless of when and where they died, or the cause of death.

It includes public gatherings at tangihanga, burials, cremations, kawē/hari mate, memorial services, processions and receptions, both indoors and outdoors.

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](#).

What happens at Alert Level 2?

Gatherings of up to 100 people are permitted (indoors or outdoors) for funerals and tangihanga at Alert Level 2.

Infection prevention and control measures

The following infection prevention and control measures must be implemented:

- The gathering must not have more than 100 people present excluding workers (for example, kaikōrero, kaikaranga, members of the clergy, and the funeral director), at any one time in a separate 'defined space'.
 - A defined space is an indoor or outdoor space that has walls or partitions that divide it from other spaces. These walls can be permanent or temporary. If outdoor, spaces are divided if everyone in one space is at least two metres from those in another space. Each defined space may have up to 100 people.

- It is the responsibility of the funeral director to ensure they can maintain physical distancing in each location. This means the number allowed in a venue may be lower than 100 people.
- The organiser must collect detailed records to facilitate fast and accurate contact tracing. Each group needs to be registered and everyone needs to be recorded.

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.

- Any venue (including funeral homes, churches, marae, community halls, mosques and private homes) where the gathering takes place must have a Health and Safety plan covering personal hygiene and infection prevention and control measures. This plan should also be updated to incorporate the guidelines for each alert level.
- The Health and Safety plan must be displayed so it is easily viewed by everyone who visit the premises and communicated to all attendees so they are aware of any restrictions and/or requirements.

People who are sick with cold or flu-like symptoms or are waiting for COVID-19 test results should not attend a funeral or tangihanga, a viewing, religious/cultural ritual, service or burial.

Appropriate handwashing facilities should be available and hand sanitiser should be provided. People should use them every time they enter a premises.

Frequently touched surfaces and objects should be sanitised after each viewing, religious/cultural ritual, service or event has taken place. For example, after each visiting group of up to 100 mourners or manuhiri have left the marae, every area that was frequently touched by people should be thoroughly sanitised and cleaned with disinfectant, this may include the paepae and ablution and wharekai facilities. This should be completed before the next visiting group arrives on the premises/venue or 'defined space'.

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

If family or whānau wish to hold a viewing, religious/cultural ritual or service for the deceased at another venue such as a marae, church, community hall, mosque or the like, responsibility for maintaining health guidelines lies with the owners or operators of those facilities.

Making funeral arrangements between funeral directors and family/whānau

When making funeral arrangements with family and whānau, funeral directors should:

- Continue to make arrangements where possible via telephone, video conferencing or other forms of electronic communication.
- Where arrangements need to be made face-to-face, ideally these should take place in the funeral home.
- Where face-to-face meetings take place, personal hygiene measures should be followed.

Funeral directors are encouraged to provide opportunities for family, whānau and friends to go to the funeral home to view the body or undertake religious/cultural rituals.

Contact tracing register

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**.

Funeral directors must also 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 viewers' 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. Attendees should not have access to anyone else's personal information.

Groupings of peoples

Each group of up to 100 people, 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'.

Registered funeral directors should handle deceased persons

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.

Viewing of the deceased

When holding viewings, religious/cultural rituals or services:

- The number of people who may attend a viewing, service or other gathering cannot exceed 100 visiting mourners or manuhiri at any one time in a separate 'defined space'. As viewing can take place over a longer period of time, multiple groups of people can move through the viewing space, as long as the total number remains at or below the maximum allowed number of people.
- Similarly, the number of people who will be able to attend a viewing, service or other gathering will need to be negotiated with the nominated kaiwhakarite or family spokesperson depending on the size of the private dwelling, marae, church, community hall, mosque or the like (taking into consideration hygiene requirements) but cannot exceed 100 visiting mourners or at any one time in a separate 'defined space'.
- People viewing a loved one should stay one metre physically distant from people they don't know.
- Records of visitors, even in private dwellings, should be kept.

Religious and/or cultural rituals

Funeral directors may also 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.

For example, Muslims have two fundamental requirements for funeral and burial - ghusl (ritual washing) and janaza (prayer over the body) - that must be carried out by Muslims and in accordance with their rules for handling of the body. In this instance, funeral directors might wish to work with the Muslim community to identify Muslim males and females who can prepare the body of the deceased person for correct funeral and burial, with the support of the embalming staff.

Activities such as kissing, washing or touching the body should be discouraged before, during and after any ritual.

Travelling to attend a funeral or tangihanga

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.

Funerals/tangihanga, burial/nehunga, cremations and receptions with food and refreshments following

Funeral directors, families or communities can carry out funerals and tangihanga during this time as long as the infection prevention and control measures are followed. These measures are outlined at the beginning of this factsheet.

Multiple groups of up to 100 are allowed to attend funerals and tangihanga in the lead up to the official burial, nehunga or cremation. However, the group that attends the service directly before the burial or nehunga must be the same group of up to 100 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 service. The serving of food and drink is permitted provided the venue can meet the physical distancing and hygiene requirements for food preparation and serving. This includes groupings of no more than 10 people eating together, food should be served as individual portions and not from a buffet, and no alcohol may be served or consumed on the premises.

It is recommended gatherings following the burial, nehunga and cremation are kept short (under two hours).

All frequently touched surfaces and objects (eg, where food is prepared and served, and kitchenware) should be thoroughly cleaned before and after each and every gathering. People may also choose to use disposable kitchenware to make the cleaning process easier.