



 Ever Loved

# Planning a Funeral During COVID-19

[everloved.com](https://www.everloved.com)

Funerals have traditionally been events where family, friends, and others gather to honor the passing of a loved one. These gatherings often bring dozens (or hundreds) of people together and involve a lot of physical closeness, something that's strongly discouraged (or even illegal) during COVID-19. Some funerals have turned into superspreader events, leading to additional deaths. Families who want to hold funerals during COVID-19 need to prioritize safety, but that doesn't mean you can't honor a loved one in a meaningful way.



## What To Expect When Planning A Funeral During COVID-19

- **Capacity restrictions.** Many funeral homes have a capacity limit and will restrict the gathering to a small number of attendees. Check with your funeral director and ask if there are any in-person gathering restrictions that you'll need to follow.
- **Preference for outdoor funerals.** Outdoor funerals and graveside services are preferable to indoor funerals while COVID-19 remains a threat. Outdoor services generally make it easier to practice social distancing and offer access to fresh air, both of which reduce the risk of infection.
- **Smaller attendance.** There are likely local restrictions on the number of guests who can attend, but regardless, you should keep your invite list small and collect RSVPs to ensure compliance. Don't take things personally if some people choose not to attend in person, as everyone has a different situation and risk tolerance.
- **Increased need for technology.** Technology can help people feel close, even if they're not close physically. Many funeral homes will now livestream services to allow people to participate in funerals remotely. You can also choose to make funeral arrangements online, order items like caskets, urns and flowers online, and even set up your funeral guest book online via a memorial website. Create one here: [Everloved.com](https://everloved.com)
- **Safety practices.** If you're holding an in-person service, sanitization practices are important. This can include periodic sanitization of surfaces, mask requirements, and availability of sanitization products to those attending.

## How To Decrease Risk Of Infection

Before you get started planning your funeral, you should be aware of and familiar with the CDC guidelines when it comes to COVID-19, as this will likely inform your funeral and your interactions with others during this time.

### Things currently known to decrease the likelihood of infection:

- Keep interactions with others short and infrequent.
- Hold the funeral virtually, instead in-person services.
- Limit the total number of attendees.
- Wait to hold the funeral until there's a vaccine.
- Limit the number of things for people to touch.
- Require masks, and keep extra masks on hand for anyone who needs one.
- Encourage social distancing by spacing people and chairs 6+ feet apart.
- Hold the gathering outdoors. If not possible, ensure the space is well ventilated and/or has the option to keep the doors open.
- Practice safe hygiene, especially hand hygiene. Keep hand sanitizer in accessible areas for attendees.
- Avoid singing hymns or songs during the service.

## Interacting With The Funeral Home

It's important to choose a funeral home that's taking COVID-19 and its risks seriously, since a funeral exposes anyone who attends in-person to an increased risk of infection. The CDC warns that in some cases, funerals have led to many people getting sick, and that changing the way funerals, visitations, and wakes are held is necessary to stop the spread. This might include asking some difficult or specific questions about a funeral home's COVID-19 practices and how they're working to ensure the safety of your attendees.

### Quick takes:

- Ask about COVID-19 restrictions, guidelines, safety and sanitization practices.
- Plan things with your funeral home online and over the phone, avoiding in-person interactions wherever possible.
- Purchase funeral products online instead of in-person. (This will also save you money!) Find some great options here: [Everloved.com/funeral-products](https://www.everloved.com/funeral-products)
- Implement your own safety guidelines and sanitization practices, if you feel they're helpful or necessary.

Each state has its own COVID-19 restrictions, and some businesses may not be required to do much. You may also find yourself in a situation where you're unsure of the COVID-19 practices that a funeral home has in place. Before you decide on a funeral home, it's important to understand what their stance on COVID-19 is.

**Some questions you may want to ask your funeral home:**

- What are your current requirements and restrictions around COVID-19?
- Is there a capacity limit for the amount of people that can attend?
- What are your sanitization practices during the services?
- Do you provide masks, hand sanitizer, or social distancing markers? Will we need to provide these items?
- Will you be directing attendees on social distancing and sanitization practices?
- Are you equipped to provide services for outdoor services or gatherings?
- What safety guidelines do staff practice?
- Do you support virtual attendance or memorials? What do your virtual memorial services look like?

When interacting with your chosen funeral home, try to reduce the amount of time that is spent interacting in person. Many funeral homes vastly prefer customers to come in for in-person consultations (which doubles as a sales tactic), so you may need to take the lead on this.

## Deciding On And Holding Services

When it comes to holding the actual service during COVID-19, you have many options available to you. Many families utilize a hybrid model by holding both in-person services and livestreaming the services for any of those who can't attend. This is a good option for most families as live streams are relatively easy to set up. You also have the options of holding a traditional in-person service that follows current COVID-19 restrictions and recommendations, holding an in-person service for immediate family only, holding an online-only memorial service, and waiting until after the vaccine is commonplace to hold a service. In any case, it's good to keep in mind both how the services align with what your loved one wanted and how the chosen service type will affect those who wish to attend.



### Holding an in-person service

In many cases, an in-person funeral service is still possible with COVID-19. However, there are important precautions to take, and it's a good idea to alter the service to be technologically friendly, so that any of those who can't attend are able to view the service online.



**For an in-person service, consider the following:**

- The guidelines and restrictions that your state, city, county, and chosen funeral home or venue have put in place during COVID-19
- The amount of people you'd like to invite and how that intersects with the restrictions put in place by your chosen venue or funeral home
- The tech savviness of those invited to the services, and the accessibility of any technology you'd like to use
- The risk factors for any friends or family members who want to attend the service

If you have an in-person service, you'll plan the funeral in the same way you'd normally plan a funeral, save for a few changes. Step by step:

- ▶ Meet with your funeral home or venue and ask about their COVID-19 practices.
- ▶ Purchase any necessary funeral products, preferably online. If you choose to purchase directly from a funeral home (keep in mind that funeral homes generally markup funeral products 300-500%), practice social distancing, wear a mask, and spend as little time as possible at the funeral home. If possible, ask for an emailed or mailed price list of their services and products, and make your decision that way.
- ▶ Consider a livestream for those who can't attend. It's very likely that you'll have some individuals in your community who simply can't take the risk of attending a gathering during COVID-19. Setting up a livestream of the service for the day of the service is a great way to make sure they're able to pay their respects, even if they can't physically attend. If you're unable to livestream the day of, recording the services and sending a video afterwards is another alternative.
- ▶ Spread the word. Use a memorial website to easily notify your friends and family of the services. When you share event information, be sure to include any and all restrictions regarding the service itself, along with any expectations you have as an organizer.
- ▶ Set up sanitization and any COVID-19 measures on the day of the service. Even if your funeral home or venue does not provide sanitizer, masks, or social distancing markers, you can still set these measures up on your own.
- ▶ On the day of the service, skip traditional religious rites that involve people touching objects, touching surfaces, singing or standing in close proximity of one another.



## Safety measures

Safety may fall to you or a close family member to enforce, depending on your local COVID-19 restrictions. Some states have far greater restrictions than others, and some families may want to take as many precautions as possible. Here are some COVID-19 restrictions to consider enforcing, even if your funeral home doesn't:

- Instruct all attendees that there's a 6-foot separation requirement in place. If necessary, purchase floor markers or set up seating in a way that separates all attendees, according to social distancing guidelines.
- Check temperatures before guests enter.
- Have a **"sanitization station"** somewhere near the services that includes:
  - ✓ Masks
  - ✓ Hand sanitizer
  - ✓ Disinfectant wipes for disinfecting surfaces

Ask your funeral home, funeral director or a family member to enforce these sanitization practices, so that you can focus on the service itself.



## Livestreaming the service

Livestreaming the service is a relatively new trend in the funeral industry, but it has become much more popular due to COVID-19. Livestreams are generally easy to set up and allow anyone who can't make the funeral to still be able to participate. If you've never set up a livestream, now is a great time to learn.

**Here's a step by step guide:**

- 1** Choose a platform. (Facebook Live and YouTube are popular and free service providers. Your funeral home might also offer a livestreaming service, but it's likely they will charge extra for this.)
- 2** Gather your equipment. You can usually capture the event with the built-in camera and microphone on a laptop (or even mobile phone).
- 3** Run some technical tests to make sure that you're able to capture what you want and the sound comes through. You may find that you want a separate microphone or camera.
- 4** Share the link to the video stream with everyone by posting it on your memorial website.
- 5** Ensure you start the stream when the service begins.
- 6** Record the stream for anyone who can't attend live (and for anyone who may want to revisit it).



## Hosting a fully virtual service

Hosting a virtual service is the safest option during COVID-19. It allows your family, friends, and community to gather in remembering a loved one they've lost, while being able to ensure everyone's safety.



## How to host a virtual memorial service

Holding a fully virtual memorial service requires planning and a little technical knowledge to keep the service organized, but anyone should be able to set one up. If you're very uncomfortable with technology, consider enlisting a more tech-savvy friend to help.

- 1 Plan out the sections of the memorial service. An online memorial service can have almost everything an in-person service would have, including readings, prayers, songs, eulogies, sermons, and more. For this reason, the funeral program should be very similar to an in-person service.
- 2 Select a time and date that you want to host the virtual service. Once you've decided on a date, notify your community by creating a memorial website and sharing it. You can do that at [Everloved.com](https://www.everloved.com)
- 3 Choose a platform to host your virtual event. Many families choose to host the virtual event over Zoom, Google Meet, YouTube or a service their funeral home provides. Once you've chosen your service and have a link, simply add it to the memorial website.
- 4 Inform anyone who will be performing readings, songs, eulogies, etc. of their part in the service. This includes letting them know the length of time you'd like them to stick to, when they'll be expected to speak or share, and how to participate (especially if they're not technically savvy).
- 5 If you'd like, create a virtual program and add it to the event information on your memorial website so everyone can access it.
- 6 If interested, leave a time at the end for people to share their memories, condolences, and favorite stories about your loved one.



## It's okay to skip the service

Due to COVID-19 and the restrictions in place, you may feel it's better to not hold a service, and that's perfectly fine. Some families decide to hold no services at all, while others plan to have a celebration of life when the pandemic has been controlled. If you decide to not hold any services (either virtually or physically) in the short term, it's still a good idea to let people know.

**Here are some steps you may want to take, should you decide to not have a service.**

- 1** Let family, friends, and your community know that no services are being held due to the pandemic. Otherwise some may wonder whether they've missed service details. Create a memorial website for the person and note that there will be no service. You can invite people to share their memories on the website.
- 2** Consider holding a celebration of life after the pandemic. Many people use a meaningful date such as a birthday, wedding anniversary or anniversary of death.

Ultimately, planning a funeral during COVID-19 can be more complex than planning a funeral during normal times. However, most people find that they can still hold a meaningful memorial. There are systems in place to support you during this difficult time, and you'll likely find that many businesses have adapted their services and models to better accommodate the restrictions in place during the pandemic.

Ever Loved is a website that helps families plan and pay for funerals. Learn more at

[Everloved.com](https://www.everloved.com) 

