

Death during the COVID-19 pandemic

Guidance



This information has been collated for the public by Shropshire Council.

We would like to offer our sincere sympathy to you, your family and friends who are affected by this sad loss. We are so sorry that you are having to cope with your loss at a time of additional stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, there is new guidance on procedures that must be in place following a death. Some of these may severely restrict our normal ways of grieving and supporting each other.

We hope that this booklet will help with the burden of navigating the new procedures and also offer some useful information that may help you over the coming weeks.



Irrespective of our background, we find significant comfort and support in the tradition of coming together in the days after a death. We all understand the rituals that happen around a death and they often provide focus and comfort in the early days and weeks of a bereavement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged and changed the traditional ways we mark our grief. For the moment, it is not possible to carry out many of the rituals that we usually find helpful. We cannot gather as extended family and friends in wakes to offer condolences and comfort and we cannot share our feelings of loss and sadness in funeral gatherings.

However, there are a number of other things that we can do that offer new and different ways to support each other. In the information below, we have tried to highlight the changes to normal practices and offer some tips that will help to guide you through the difficulties.

Take time to make your plans and decisions. Asking advice and sharing the burden with others can be helpful. If you want to share the information in the booklet, it can be accessed online along with other bereavement resources <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/bereavement-services/latest-news/options-for-those-unable-to-attend-a-funeral-or-visit-a-cemetery/>

For those people who are isolating or shielding, and need food, or other practical support please contact Shropshire Council on the COVID19 helpline on 03456789028.

For further support and advice Our Practical Steps To Take Once Someone is Bereaved, Bereavement Checklist can be found on pages 6-14.

Death registration

When a person dies, a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) is completed by the treating doctor and given to the family. This would have been taken, along with a death registration form, to a Registrar's Office to enable a death certificate to be issued. This has been the required process before a funeral can take place.

What is different now?

During the current COVID-19 pandemic MCCDs are being forwarded electronically by a doctor to the General Registrar's Office, along with the Next of Kin's name and contact details. The Registrar will in turn contact that person via telephone to gather the necessary information to allow the death to be registered. The Next of Kin may also be asked which funeral director they plan to use.

Additional death certificates may be required in order to attend to some of your loved one's affairs. These copies can be ordered when you contact the registrar 0345 678 9016.

Burials and Cremations

When a person dies, funerals are how we celebrate and commemorate their lives and memories. This normally includes a service attended by family and friends followed by a burial or cremation.

What is different now?

During the current pandemic, you may need to make changes to the way the funeral service happens compared to what was anticipated. Traditional church services will not take place and funeral services will be held at the graveside with attendance limited to immediate family members, socially distancing where they are not part of the same household.

Due to the small size of some of the chapel rooms and the crematorium the number of mourners will be limited, made up from members of the person's household and close

family members, or, if the above are unable to attend, close friends. By close family members we mean grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses and offspring.

The Government has had to make these difficult changes to prevent further spread of the COVID-19 virus. We recognise that this will add to the distress of everyone who experiences bereavement at this time. As the situation is changing on a regular basis your family funeral director will be able to provide you with the most up-to-date information. It may also be important to have early conversations with your faith leader to understand what they are able to provide.

Please see Bereavement Checklist on pages 6-14– Practical Steps To Take Once Someone is Bereaved for further support and advice.



Property

When someone dies in a place other than their own home, for example a hospital or nursing home, there may be personal clothing and property to be collected.

What is different now?

Due to COVID-19 pandemic there will need to be additional precautions with regards to your loved one's property. Hospital/ care home staff will give you details of any valuables belong to your loved one that are help securely by them and let you know how to personal belongings will be returned to you.

People / Organisations to tell

A large number of people and organisations need to be informed when someone dies. This list will help you determine the relevant people to notify - not all will apply in every case. A family member or close friend could help.

Early contact will help avoid the distress of letters, phone calls and supplies/equipment continuing in the weeks and months ahead.

- GP/district nurse/home help/day care centre
- Other health care professionals (for example, optician, dentist, podiatrist etc)
- Provider of medical aids/equipment/supplies
- Any hospital the person was attending
- Solicitor – contact before the funeral to check if there is a will stating person's wishes about burial or cremation
- Employer/trade union/pension company

- Bank/building society/Post Office/credit union/credit card company/financial advisor
- Mortgage company/Housing Executive/landlord
- Insurance company (personal, household, vehicle – if you are 2nd named driver on the policy you will no longer be insured)
- HM Revenue & Customs (tax office)
- DVA (driving licence)/DVLA (vehicle registration)
- Shropshire Council regarding travel pass
- Passport office
- Utilities – gas/electricity/telephone/mobile phone companies
- Season ticket issuers
- Gym membership

**Please see Bereavement Checklist on pages 6-14
Practical Steps To Take Once Someone is Bereaved for
further support and advice.**

Planning a funeral during this current physical distancing phase.

We appreciate that physical distancing requirements make bereavement and funerals even more difficult, but there are immediate steps you can take to plan the funeral of someone you love or care about.

- Contact your preferred funeral director as soon as you are able.
- Your funeral director will be equipped with the most up-to-date information and procedures due to the COVID-19 pandemic response period. They will guide you through the process.



Grieving in exceptional times

Many of the supports that you might normally draw upon when you are grieving may not be possible to access due to social distancing. Despite this, there are things that you can do which may be of help.

- Allow yourself to feel and react in a way that is natural to you.
- Grief is an individual experience and each of us will respond to it in our own particular way.
- Try not to become emotionally isolated. Even if people cannot visit you in person they will be able to offer their condolences and support in different ways. You may receive condolence cards, phone-calls, text messages and emails etc.
- Keep conversations going with the people who are closest to you, even by telephone or on social media.
- Having 'conversations' through WhatsApp or through Facebook can mean there is a regular flow of communication and remind you that people are thinking about you.
- Try to limit how much news and social media you consume.
- When you are feeling very sad, regular news can be distressing.
- Try to stick to your normal routine as much as is currently possible. As well as bedtime and getting up time, mealtimes play an important part in this.
- It is important to remember to eat and to keep hydrated. Your body has needs and grief can be hard work.
- Ask as many questions as you need.
- If you can, try to get out into the garden or open the windows to let in some fresh air.
- If there are children in your household, check in with them often. Answer their questions honestly.

Children and young people are likely to feel anxious and confused if things aren't spoken about and they don't have an opportunity to ask questions. They may, at the same time be reluctant to talk if they see, or fear that others will be upset.

There are a variety of books and resources available to support conversations with children. See Child Bereavement UK <https://www.childbereavementuk.org> information Sheets can be downloaded free: Schools will be able to support and advise and sign post families to additional support if and as required.

- Make use of reputable sources of online bereavement support such as:
 - Cruse Bereavement Care provides free support, advice and information for adults, children and young people.
 - Local Helpline: 0845 606 6912

National Freephone Helpline: 0808 808 1677. Opening hours Monday-Friday 9.30am-5.00pm (excluding bank holidays), with extended hours on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, until 8pm.

- GriefChat (www.griefchat.co.uk) is a safe online space where people can share their story, explore their feelings and be supported by a qualified bereavement counsellor. The service is free of charge and is open Monday-Friday, 9am-9pm (UK time) for people who are grieving or bereaved.

Finally, remember to be kind to yourself. In grief you can only do the best you can.

Please see Bereavement Checklist on pages 6-14 – Practical Steps To Take Once Someone is Bereaved for further support and advice.

Bereavement Checklist – Practical Steps To Take Once Someone is Bereaved

We are really sorry to hear about your recent bereavement and understand this is a very difficult time.

We'd like to be able to offer you some support and advice about some of the changes that have been made to the usual processes that are in place when you lose a close family member.

Some things have recently changed due to the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID19).

The checklist below lists those things that can be a reminder to some of the practical things that you need to do.

Usual Approach	Current Approach due to COVID19	Complete	Accompanying Script
Registering the death			
Contact the doctor (GP) or hospital about obtaining the medical certificate of cause of death or contact the coroners office to find out when you may be able to register the death.	Phone the GP or hospital to find out when they will be able to issue the medical certificate of cause of death. Do not visit the surgery or hospital. If the Coroner has been involved, they will contact you to advise you of what to do next.		Royal Shrewsbury Hospital: 01743 261384 Princess Royal Hospital: 01952 641222 extension 4741

Usual Approach	Current Approach due to COVID19	Complete	Accompanying Script
Who can register a death?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relative of the deceased • Someone present at the death • The person causing the burial or cremation of the body • The occupier of the house if a death happened within a house • A senior member of the administration team if a death occurred in a hospital or care home • A funeral director 		
Telephone the Registrar of Births and Deaths to make an appointment to register the death.	<p>To register a death please telephone Shropshire Council on 0345 678 9016 to inform them that you need to register a death. They will ask you for the following information:</p> <p>Your name and contact details, the name of the deceased, their date of death and place of death, The name of the GP practice if known.</p>		<p>Please see link for current information</p> <p>https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/bereavement-services/register-a-death/</p>
	<p>The registrars team will contact you by telephone once they have received the medical certificate of cause of death from the doctor or the hospital and will register the death with you.</p>		

Usual Approach	Current Approach due to COVID19	Complete	Accompanying Script
	<p>After the registration the registrar will enter the details into the 'Tell us Once' system which will generate a special reference number which you will be given and which will then allow you to telephone the DWP or go on line and inform the following departments and agencies of the death of your loved one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Pension • Pension Credit • Housing Benefit • Council Tax • Council Tax Benefit • Attendance Allowance • Carers Allowance • Blue Badge Parking Permit • Disability Living Allowance • Income Support • Incapacity Benefit • Employment Support Allowance • Child Benefit • Tax Credit • Library Services • Electoral Services • Bus Passes • Passport • Driving Licence 		<p>'Tell us Once' is a national programme led by the Department for Work and Pensions on behalf of the Government as a whole, to transform the way in which people can tell Government (Central and Local) about changes to their circumstances. There are 2 levels of 'Tell Us Once' service:</p> <p>Basic: All deaths registered in Shropshire are entered into the 'Tell Us Once' System and where the full service has not been opted for, families are provided with a letter providing information on how to use the full service themselves either on-line or over the telephone. This service is provided to all death informants during the usual 30 minute death registration appointment.</p>

Usual Approach	Current Approach due to COVID19	Complete	Accompanying Script
	<p>In addition to the 'Tell us Once' details, you will also be asked if you would like to purchase a copy of the death entry. Only one can be purchased immediately after registration at a cost of £11.00 but you can telephone us to order further copies at any time. Payment will be taken over the phone by card.</p>		
<p>Vulnerable or older people who may require additional support due to the death.</p>	<p>If the person registering the death is aware of any person impacted by the death (including themselves) who could be in need of additional advice, guidance or support due to being in a vulnerable or shielded group, they should inform the registrar who can signpost to appropriate services.</p>		<p>We recognise that there may be instances where immediate practical support is required such as advice on financial issues, help with shopping or advice about for other concerns. The registrars team will be able to connect you to the appropriate person to address these concerns.</p>
<p>Complete the Notification or Registration of Death Form (BD8) that you were given by the Registrar of Deaths. This will inform every department of the NI number of the deceased but it is advisable to telephone relevant tax, benefits and pensions offices as soon as possible to avoid inadvertent over-payment of pensions and benefits.</p>	<p>You will be sent your certificate in the post along with a form called a BD8 which should be completed and returned to the DWP.</p>		

Usual Approach	Current Approach due to COVID19	Complete	Accompanying Script
	<p>If you have spoken to your funeral director, they will ask you for the “green form” this is the document which allows them to deal with a funeral and collect your loved one from a mortuary. The registrar will send this over to your chosen funeral director electronically so there is no need to worry about this.</p>		
Arranging the Funeral			
<p>Contact your chosen Funeral Director to discuss the arrangements and your religious/spiritual advisor.</p>	<p>To find out about funeral arrangements you will need to contact your chosen funeral director to discuss your circumstances.</p> <p>Due to the small size of some of the chapel rooms and the crematorium the number of mourners will be limited, made up from members of the person’s household and close family members, or, if the above are unable to attend, close friends. By close family members we mean grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses and offspring.</p>		<p>Shropshire is currently following the national government guidance relating to social distancing and keeping people safe and there are some restrictions on how funerals and cremations are conducted but we are working to support your wishes.</p>

Usual Approach	Current Approach due to COVID19	Complete	Accompanying Script
	<p>This is because some chapel rooms and the crematorium have limited space and need to comply with social distancing requirements.</p> <p>We request that anyone who is showing symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19) doesn't attend a funeral service or visit a council cemetery due to the risk that they pose to others. Live streaming of funeral services can be arranged - please speak with your chosen funeral director to make the necessary arrangements.</p> <p>Close family members of the deceased may be required to self isolate at the time the funeral is held. In such cases those mourners can attend as long as they're not showing actual symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19). However, please ensure that your chosen funeral director is aware. You must make your own travel arrangements and should not attend if you know that a mourner attending is in the extremely clinically vulnerable category.</p>		<p>We recognise that this will add to the distress of everyone who experiences bereavement at this time. As the situation is changing on a regular basis your family funeral director will be able to provide you with the most up-to-date information. It may also be important to have early conversations with your faith leader to understand what they are able to provide.</p>

Usual Approach	Current Approach due to COVID19	Complete	Accompanying Script
<p>There may be a will in place, and the wishes of the deceased may ask for certain things.</p>			<p>Shropshire is currently following the national government guidance relating to social distancing and keeping people safe and there are some restrictions on how funerals and cremations are conducted but we are working to support your wishes.</p> <p>We recognise that this will add to the distress of everyone who experiences bereavement at this time. As the situation is changing on a regular basis your family funeral director will be able to provide you with the most up-to-date information. It may also be important to have early conversations with your faith leader to understand what they are able to provide.</p>

The following actions have not changed due to COVID19

Usual Approach	Complete	Accompanying Script
Informing Other People		
Let other family members know and friends about the death.		A large number of people and organisations need to be informed when someone dies. Determine the relevant people to be notified. A family member or close friend could help.
Do employer or educational establishments need to know?		
Cancel existing appointments with health professionals, dentists, podiatrists.		
Agencies providing care at home.		
Financial Organisations		
Banks, building societies/savings funds, investment funds.		Early contact will help avoid the distress of letters, phone calls and supplies/equipment continuing in the weeks and months ahead.
Insurance Companies (life, building, car, house contents, travel, medical).		
Pension Providers.		
Credit Card/ Store Cards.		
Financial Institutions need to be notified of the deceased to avoid fraudsters so that any account in the sole name can be frozen.		

Usual Approach	Complete	Accompanying Script
Joint account holders will need to do the same although the account should still be accessible by the other person.		
Property and Utilities		
Mortgage Provider.		
If in rented accommodation inform the Local Authority, Housing Provider, or landlord.		
Pension Providers.		
Buildings and property insurance companies especially if property unoccupied.		
Utility companies such as gas, electricity, water, telephone.		<p>Can we help you via our Community Re-assurance Teams?</p> <p>Shropshire Council has set up temporary area-based Community Reassurance Teams (CRT) only for responding to COV19 during this crisis, they will provide support to the new and existing community groups set up in response to COVID-19, Town and Parish Councils and other organisations.</p> <p>Community Reassurance Team communityreassurance@shropshire.gov.uk 0345 678 9028 Monday – Friday 8am – 6pm Saturdays 8am – 1pm.</p>

Usual Approach	Complete	Accompanying Script
TV/Internet Companies.		
Other Contacts		
Arrange re-direction of mail if necessary and register with the bereavement register to avoid unnecessary mail for the deceased.		<p>If someone you know has died, we can reduce the amount of unwanted marketing post being sent to them, stopping painful daily reminders.</p> <p>By registering with our free service, the names and addresses of the deceased are removed from mailing lists, stopping most advertising mail within as little as six weeks. https://www.thebereavementregister.org.uk/</p>
Clubs, memberships, social groups.		
Cancellation of firearms licence via police station.		
Dealing with the Estate		
Find out if the deceased made a will and where it is held.		<p>Shropshire Council Bereavement Service guide may offer useful guidance and advice https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/5662/shropshire-bereavment-guide.pdf</p>

Usual Approach	Complete	Accompanying Script
<p>If no will is in place then there will need to be a decision about who can sort out the deceased's estate and who will contact the Probate Register to apply for letters of administration.</p>		
<p>Find out if probate, is needed, and if so obtain the will which will contain the names of the Executors.</p>		
<p>If there is a will the Executor is responsible for that. Locate documents relating to financial affairs and property.</p>		
<p>The executor or administrator will need to decide how to go about the probate approach and whether to use a professional or do it themselves. Further information is available on 0800 258 5556.</p>		

Further national guidelines and support

Funerals and memorials

When a person dies, funerals are how we celebrate and commemorate their lives and memories. This normally includes a service attended by family and friends followed by a burial or cremation.

What is different now?

To find out about local funeral arrangements you will need to contact your local funeral director to discuss your circumstances.

Due to social distancing funeral gatherings will need to have limited numbers of mourners made up from members of the person's household and close family members, or, if the above are unable to attend, close friends. By close family members we mean grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses and offspring. This is because of the small size of the chapel/service room and the need to comply with social distancing requirements.

We request that anyone who is showing symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19) doesn't attend a funeral service or visit a council cemetery due to the risk that they pose to others. Live streaming of funeral services can be arranged – please speak with your chosen funeral director to make the necessary arrangements.

Close family members of the deceased may be required to self isolate at the time the funeral is held. In such cases those mourners can attend as long as they're not showing actual symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19). However, please ensure that your chosen funeral director is aware. You must make your own travel arrangements and should not attend if you know that a mourner attending is in the extremely clinically vulnerable category.

All mourners should travel separately with members of their own household. Where this is not possible and funeral transport is used, the numbers allowed in cars will need to be limited to meet social distancing requirements. Once mourners arrive at the funeral in the chapel or crematorium they will need to adhere to social distancing requirements of being two metres apart.

Visiting Cemeteries

To confirm if a cemetery is open please contact 0345 678 9000 or visit <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/bereavement-services/latest-news/latest-changes-to-bereavement-services-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>. Many cemeteries are managed by the local Town/Parish Council or the local Church, check with these organisations if appropriate.

We request visitors to graves sensitively respect the privacy of funeral gatherings.

If you are showing symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) please do not visit the cemeteries due to the risk that they pose to others.

If you are self-isolating due to another member of the household being unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) you may attend a funeral in some circumstances, please speak with and notify your chosen Funeral Director.

If you are self-isolating due to another member of the household being unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) please defer your routine visit to tend to a grave until your period of self-isolation has expired.

We also request visitors to:

- follow by social distancing requirements
- keep at least two metres apart from other visitors to the cemeteries
- only engage with onsite staff if absolutely essential such as an emergency situation and
- avoid using the onsite taps/watering cans/bins to reduce the risk of spreading infection.

The opening hours and procedures of the cemeteries will be kept under review, please check the council's website for the most up to date information.

What to Do When Someone Dies in Hospital with COVID19

If the deceased has died in a hospital and you are the named next of kin, the hospital staff will inform you. Many hospitals have bereavement staff who coordinate the issue of documentation and explain the procedures to you. In other places this may be done by the ward staff.

Please note that preparing the documents takes time as they can only be completed by medical staff who were directly involved in the care of the patient whilst they were alive. Most hospitals operate appointment systems for collecting documents and belongings of patients who have died.

In some cases the hospital medical staff will have to refer the death to the coroner. This means they will not be able to issue the Medical Certificate and the coroner's officer will give you further information about when you can register the death. You may be asked to sign formal documents so the belongings of the deceased can be given to you.

You will be asked to contact a funeral director who will arrange to collect the deceased from the hospital. You may need to sign a form authorising the funeral director to take the deceased to the funeral home.

What is different now?

Due to the current situation of responding to the Coronavirus outbreak, in line with the current Government guidelines, we are no longer able to offer appointments to relatives to collect the MCCD from the hospital. In partnership with Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council services, we are sending completed certificates electronically to the offices to prevent the need for relatives to attend the hospital. The Bereavement service will notify you when this has been written and sent to the Registrar so that you can contact the relevant office to make arrangements to formally register the death of your relative.

The service will advise you on their current process for carrying out the registration.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Bereavement service and we will assist you through this incredibly difficult time.

We can be contacted on:

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital: 01743 261384

Princess Royal Hospital: 01952 641222 extension 4741.

Help and support

The following information may help you to find and support with your concerns or connect to appropriate services.

Shropshire Council COVID-19 helpline

Tel: 0345 678 9028

Community Reassurance Teams

communityreassurance@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 0345 6789028

Registrars

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/bereavement-services/register-a-death/>

Tel: 0345 678 9016

Funeral directors

Directory of local funeral directors

<http://www.uk-funerals.co.uk/funeral-directors/shropshire.html>

Shropshire Council Bereavement Service

Offers information and advice on local services

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/bereavement-services/>

Shropshire Family Information Service Directory Bereavement

Offers local information and support including counselling support and services

<http://search3.openobjects.com/kb5/shropshire/fid/results.page?qt=bereavement&term=&familychannel=0&sorttype=relevance>

Gov.UK

General advice on what to do when someone dies

<https://www.gov.uk/when-someone-dies>

Tel: 0800 731 0469 or textphone 0800731 0464

Help with funeral costs

Please check to see whether the deceased person had a pre-paid funeral plan or funeral insurance.

Money Advice Service Guidance

This Money Advice Service web page contains useful guidance on how you can get help paying for a funeral. It includes information on who can claim and how to claim a Funeral Expenses Payment if you receive certain benefits.

Tel: 0800 138 7777

Turn2us

Turn2us helps people in financial need gain access to welfare benefits, charitable grants and other financial help – online, by phone and face to face through our partner organisations.
Email: consent@turn2us.org.uk

Shropshire Council – Civil funerals

Information on Civil funerals (for those with no particular religious beliefs), including how much they cost.

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/bereavement-services/civil-funerals/>

Public Health Act funerals

There are occasions when people die and there are no relatives or friends available to arrange their funeral. In such cases Shropshire Council are responsible for arranging the funeral of any person who has died within our boundary, other than in hospital, where it appears that no other agency or persons are making suitable arrangements for the disposal of the body. These are known as Public Health Act funerals.

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/environmental-health/environmental-protection-and-prevention/public-health-act-funerals/>

Tel: 0345 678 9067

Details of Bereavement Officers at SaTH Trust:

A Bereavement Officer is available during normal office hours,
Monday to Thursday 9am-5pm,
Friday 9am-4.30pm.

They can be contacted on:

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital Tel: 01743 261384

Princess Royal Hospital Tel: 01952 641222 ext. 4741.



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This booklet has been adapted
with permission from
the Public Health Agency,
Northern Ireland.

May 2020

