

There is an expected death at home or in a hospital. **The Coronavirus Act 2020 (the Act) states where the deceased has been visited by a doctor in the last 28 days (extended from 14 days normally) or has been seen after death (if that meets a number of conditions) they can produce the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD). The MCCD can now be produced by any registered medical practitioner without having attended the deceased provided they are sufficiently able from the available information to ascertain the cause of death.**

Once an MCCD is produced families can register the death, **the Act allows funeral directors to do this on behalf of the family if necessary. The Act also allows for registration to be done over the phone and the MCCD to be shared electronically.** Registrars produce a certificate for burial or cremation (also known as a green form) and a death certificate, which is a certified copy of the death entry on the register. **The green form can now be shared electronically with the crematoria or burial authority.** Registrars may refer a death to the Coroner. If a death is referred to the coroner the death cannot be registered and registrars cannot produce the death certificate until they have received a response from the Coroner. **Deaths should still be registered within 5 days.**

Coroners investigate deaths that are violent or unnatural, where the cause of death is not known, or the person died in prison, police custody or another type of state detention. Doctors, police, registrars and families can all refer deaths to a coroner **They will store the body until the investigation is over. As a result of the Act they will not have to undertake a jury inquest for Covid-19 deaths.**

After the death is registered a funeral will need to be organised, normally this is done through a funeral director who will generally store the body until the funeral. **Councils may have mortuaries of their own, this is normally used for coronial cases, however the Secretary of State can require councils to provide mortuaries. A number of councils have put in place temporary mortuaries for use during the pandemic.** Funeral directors liaise with council bereavement services to organise a cremation or burial. There are different forms and processes that will need to be used depending on whether the body will be buried or cremated.

When cremation is chosen there are normally two forms that will need to be completed by medical professionals before the cremation can take place – Cremation form 4 and Cremation form 5. **Whilst the Act is in place there is no need for the additional confirmatory medical certificate, otherwise known as Cremation form 5. Therefore only cremation form 4 is needed for cremation, this is normally filled out by the doctor who produced the MCCD, however the Act includes provisions to allow any medical practitioner to fill in Cremation form 4 if certain conditions are met. Cremation form 4 can be submitted electronically to the crematoria.**

When burial is chosen funeral directors can help families to apply for burial and gaining exclusive rights of burial. The burial could be in a grave that the family already have the rights to use, a new grave which they buy the right for or a reused grave in some cases. Families may also choose to bury cremated remains, in which case they would need to purchase the grave rights or use an existing grave right.

If the body is being cremated an application for cremation (called cremation form 1) needs to be filled out by the family. **This should still happen but can be done electronically.**

Cremation forms 1 and 4 **(but not 5 during the COVID-19 emergency)** should be sent to the crematoria over 48 hours before the cremation takes place, these will be checked by a medical referee on behalf of the council. Medical referees then fill out the relevant forms allowing the cremation (cremation form 10). They can stop cremations taking place if necessary. Families have the right to inspect these forms. Cremation form 4 is not needed if the death has been referred to the Coroner, who will instead issue a Cremation form 6 to allow the cremation to go ahead.

A funeral takes place when the council have received the relevant forms, and for cremation these have been checked by medical referees. **Currently only the deceased's household, close family members, or if neither of these can attend close friends should attend funeral services. Crematoria will have their own limits on the number of mourners, to ensure social distancing in the chapel. Crematoria buildings are closed, except for funerals. PHE have said that funerals should not be delayed during the current crisis.**

If there is no one willing or able to pay for the funeral, then the council has a duty to provide a public health funeral, if the death occurred in a hospital, the hospital should make the funeral arrangements. Some people on qualifying benefits can also receive support through the Social Fund Funeral Payment which is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions.

* Bold copy denotes the changes to the death management processes.

Government guidance on the changes to the death management process can be found online here:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-those-involved-in-managing-covid-19-deaths/guidance-for-those-involved-in-managing-covid-19-deaths