

Active Response IV

Cemeteries and Crematoria

Families of the deceased need to understand why the rules are there and how they work. Funeral Directors are key to informing families.

So far, most families have accepted how things are and been able to work with it, even if it is hard at times.

We are there to serve the family: that is what is at the end of all our planning.

[Simon Mannering, Funeral Directors Association NZ, NZ Embalmers Association]

Applying the rules

The Government's rules for viewings, funerals and burials, developed by the Ministry of Health are available [here](#). The rules are consistent with the key message of 'people staying within the household bubble' which includes the deceased. This means:

No Public Funeral Services

No Tangi

No Private Family Funeral Services

This applies to all deceased persons, regardless of when and where they died, or the cause of death.

It includes public gatherings at burials, cremations, memorial services, funeral wakes, processions or receptions and social gatherings, both indoors and outdoors.

Viewings

Household bubbles cannot be mixed for a viewing or a burial, and only members of the deceased person's own bubble may attend

Viewings must occur:

- In a controlled environment, with the Registered Funeral Director deciding on the venue's capacity to keep people at a safe distance
- Physical distancing may mean some family bubbles have a split time for viewing
- Funeral Directors must always be present, including during viewing.



Funerals

Public funerals are not permitted. Directors must plan for the following options:

- a small funeral with only the immediate bubble present.
- embalming or cremating the body and holding the funeral or memorial service after the lockdown period is finished.

Probably 90% of families our company has dealt with are wanting a memorial service at the conclusion of this [lockdown period].

[Simon Mannering, Funeral Directors Association NZ, NZ Embalmers Association]

Burials

The people in the household bubble CAN:

- attend the burial, providing their own transport.
- carry the casket IF they have enough people in the household bubble of the deceased to carry it (otherwise the cemetery staff will do this).

There are other ways to support those who cannot attend the funeral including:

- Online streaming
- Recording and sharing with the family and others.

Families and cemetery staff must maintain physical distancing from staff at the site and *cannot* share the carrying of the casket.

- Families cannot carry out backfilling of the plot; this is only possible by cemetery staff

NOTE:

Funeral Directors and Cemetery staff are not the enforcers regarding people outside the deceased's bubble. Where the rules are breached or there are concerns, contact the Police for assistance.

The new rules will be challenging for everyone, and in particular for some cultures and religions, so it's really important to remain mindful of WHY the restrictions are in place.

[Shelley Angus, Cemeteries Manager Hutt City Council]

Planning ahead

“If you think you’re ready, you’re not”

Cindi Crooks, Christchurch Relationships Manager, City Care

Cindi’s experiences following the Mosque shootings in Christchurch gave her insight into what might be ahead. “Get simple tasks done and prepare” she says.

Planning

Get your structure in place, including succession planning in case of staff illness.

Have an Escalation Plan. What’s the worst-case scenario? Where are the gaps in services or plant? For example, City Care in Christchurch separated their Sextons a week prior to lockdown and allocated a labourer to those who needed one.

Create a Communication Tree. Ensure everyone has access to correct phone numbers, and that ‘the right people communicate with the right people’

Expanding staffing

What’s the level [of burials] you feel comfortable with and what’s the numbers you’re going to max out, you need a new plan? Have this discussion with your teams.

[Sheree Stout, Operations Sexton, Auckland City Council]

Prepare for a sped-up burial process.

- Sextons managing teams
- Multiple teams, particularly in larger areas, that can quickly increase capacity
- Identify where you can access extra staff. Where will they come from? How that will work?
- Where there are multiple cemeteries, other councils who may be able to assist
- Remind staff- **priority tasks** only. Send them home after burials are completed.
- Keeping staff engaged and informed of any changes via online regular team meetings.

Managing on site

Plan for the following:

- Blank cemetery maps, names can be added on site, ensuring certainty about who is where
- Consider a mobile printer on site for templates and burial notices or access to online burial software

- Ensure power sources for equipment and phone chargers
- Food, water, HR and support staff on site to help with anxiety or stress.
- Line marking out possible head beams or plots in new burial areas
- Supply lists created and products sourced e.g Muslim boards

Plant and machinery

- Diggers, operators and hire services including portaloos for staff
- Check the PPE for staff, and whether it’s on-site

Burial processes

- Graves: single or double depth, alternate burial plots leaving operational spaces between
- Availability and use of existing beams.

Communication

Good communication is vital – how and when you communicate, clear messages and open lines of communication even when under pressure.

Principles	Action
Coordination	Be clear about the priorities, staff and other resources. Work with other councils if required. Do as much preparation as possible.
Consider	Who are your providers? Are they operating under Level 4 lockdown?
Collaboration	Support teams to work effectively and in ways that reduce stress.
Care	Be thoughtful of the families, the Funeral Directors and the cemetery and crematoria staff
Communication	Keep communication open, and keep people informed. Explain why.

Find out more. Watch the recent [webinar](#).

This Insights is based on a webinar hosted by a range of experts from the Funeral Directors, Cemeteries and Crematoria sector. Thanks to: Simon Mannering, Funeral Directors Association NZ, NZ Embalmers Association; Shelley Angus, Cemeteries Manager, Hutt City Council; and Cindi Crooks, Christchurch Relationships Manager, City Care.