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COVID-19 Guidance: Funeral and Bereavement Services in the Territory of Akwesasne



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THIS IS A DIRECTIVE OF MCA / SRMT EOC's.

COVID-19 Guidance: Funeral and Bereavement Services in the Territory of Akwesasne

PURPOSE

The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (MCA) and the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (SRMT) continues to follow guidelines from the Ministry / Department of Health. This guidance document provides basic information only. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. MCA / SRMT continually monitors the Ministry / Department of Health (MOH) COVID-19 website regularly for new and ever-changing information, data and “best practices” as its relates to updating and revising to this document, definitions, FAQs, and other information.

ESSENTIAL SERVICE

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Government of Ontario / New York State announced the shutdown of all non-essential services across the province / state. These governments have deemed businesses providing funeral, mortician, cremation, transfer, and burial services, and any related goods and products (such as coffins and embalming fluid) to be essential services that are eligible to remain open. Funeral and burial services are vital services that are delivered to the Territory of Akwesasne. Therefore, MCA / SRMT will adhere to and respect the health and safety measures currently in place that protect our community members from potential COVID-19 exposure. This protocol has been created with the assistance of MCA / SRMT Emergency Operations Center (EOC) personnel and professional funeral services on both sides of the Canadian and U.S. border that provide funeral services to the territory of Akwesasne.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

- Capacity:** The maximum amount of attendees that may be present at the wake / funeral service is a total of **fifty (50) people** (Example: twenty-five (25) people inside the residence and twenty-five (25) outside of the residence, etc.). The maximum capacity includes, church representatives, funeral professionals, service providers, prayer groups, pallbearers and others.
- Food Storage Container:** A food storage container is used to hold food at room temperature, in the refrigerator, or in the freezer. All food storage containers must have covers / lids.
- Funeral Service:** A funeral service is a ceremony connected with the final disposition of a deceased person (e.g. church service, burial, cremation, etc.) where the attendees pay respects to the deceased person.
- Manufacturer:** A person or company that makes goods for sale (e.g. Coca Cola, Pepsi, Nestle, etc.).
- MOH Tracking Guide Book** The Ministry of Health (MOH) requires all professional funeral service providers to maintain a book that lists the names and contact information of all attendees of a wake / funeral service. This book is utilized for tracking purpose should a COVID-19 exposure or outbreak occur.

Official Outbreak:	According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an official outbreak consists of two (2) or more related and / or linked to the same source of exposure of COVID-19.
Traditional Bundle	The respective act of giving away and / or distribution of personal possessions of the deceased.
Wake:	A wake is a social gathering associated with death, usually held before a funeral. Traditionally, a wake takes place in the residence of the deceased with the body present.

TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19

The risk of transmission of COVID-19 from handling the body of a deceased person is low, but mortuary and funeral staff should take extra precaution in employing **Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC)** measures when handling deceased bodies. **No** community member shall handle the body of the deceased. All contact and handling of the body of the deceased shall be left to mortuary and funeral professionals.

TRANSPORTATION OF BODIES

There is no change to the usual body transport protocols for COVID-19 related deaths for mortuary or funeral professionals. **No** community member shall transport the body of a deceased person.

HANDLING OF DECEASED BODIES

Before accepting deceased persons, funeral directors are required to follow their IPAC policies and procedures to ensure their personal health and safety in accordance to Ministry guidelines. Only funeral directors shall conduct donning/doffing to the body of a deceased person. **No** community member shall handle the body of a deceased person.

RECEIVING BODIES OF DECEASED

Any community member who wishes to host the wake and / or funeral service at their private residence, whether indoors or outdoors, shall conduct the following health and safety measures prior to receiving the body of a deceased person:

- a. Completely clean and sanitize the room identified where the coffin will be located;
- b. Clear the room / area where the coffin of the deceased person will be located;
- c. Identify the exact location where the coffin of the deceased person will be placed;
- d. Set up seating that respects social distancing of six (6) feet / two (2) meters;
- e. Have PPE (e.g. face masks, gloves, etc.) and hand sanitizing gels / liquids readily available; and
- f. Ensure that all surfaces are cleaned and sanitized (e.g. door handles, railings, light switches, faucets, cupboards, appliances, tables, chairs, toilets, electronic devices, etc.).

COVID-19 TRACKING MEASURES

Any community member who wishes to host a wake and / or funeral service at their private residence, whether indoors and / or outdoors, shall ensure that the home owner or a

representative thereof work with funeral professionals to identify a specific location for the staging of the “Guest Book” and “MOH Tracking Guide Book” for the explicit purpose of tracking measures should a confirmed case of COVID-19 and / or a potential exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19, be reported.

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE SIGNAGE

Any community member who wishes to host a wake and / or funeral service at **their private residence**, whether indoors and / or outdoors, shall ensure that the home owner or a representative thereof pickup a “funeral package” from the MCA / SRMT Government offices that include the following items:

- COVID-19 Guidance: Funeral and Bereavement Services in the Territory of Akwesasne;
- Social Etiquette Signage; and
- Akwesasne Donation Application. (Avoid visits to various Akwesasne facilities (e.g. Admin #1))

All social etiquette signage shall be utilized and **visibly posted** throughout the private residence, whether indoors and / or outdoors and through the duration of the wake and / or funeral service. Below are examples of COVID-19 Social Etiquette signage:



HEALTH & SAFETY MEASURES DURING WAKE / FUNERAL SERVICE

Any community member who wishes to host a wake and / or funeral service at **their private residence**, whether indoors and / or outdoors, shall enforce the following health and safety measures:

- Maintain a group / crowd capacity of no more than **fifty (50)** people;
- All indoor residential surfaces must be continually cleaned and sanitized (e.g. door handles, light switches, faucets, cupboards, appliances, tables, chairs, etc.); and
- All wake / funeral attendees must respect and adhere to respiratory etiquette (e.g. covering cough, sneeze into your arm, hand washing, avoid touching, social distancing, etc.);
- All wake / funeral attendees must wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE), (e.g. face masks, etc.);
- All wake / funeral service providers (e.g. caterers, florists, servers, business / food donators, etc.) entering the residence and / or outdoor gathering areas (e.g. gazebo, pavilion, tent, porches, decks, garages, etc.) must wear personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times;
- Avoid serving and / or consuming food and drinks in the same location of the body of the deceased person / coffin;

- g. Ensure that all bathrooms and / or porta-potties are continually cleaned, sanitized and stocked (e.g. toilet paper, paper towels, air freshener, etc.);
- h. Ensure that social distancing of six (6) feet / two (2) meters is enforced;
- i. It is recommended that the family of the deceased designate “food servers” to serve food during meals, unless a caterer provides this service;
- j. Practice proper hand washing hygiene before and after contact with any person; and
- k. Protect vulnerable individuals, especially our Elders who are age sixty-five (65+) or older and who have existing medical conditions.

CEASE OF WAKE / FUNERAL SERVICES

In the event that respective Councils receive reports and / or telephone calls that these protocols are not being respected and / or followed, our respective Councils reserve the right to cease all wake and funeral services within the territory of Akwesasne.

DURATION TIME OF WAKE SERVICE

No wake service hosted at a private residence or at an Akwesasne facility (e.g. Tri-District Elders, Snye Homemakers, Kateri Hall, etc.), whether indoors and / or outdoors, shall exceed a period of forty-eight (48-hrs) hours or two (2) days.

ACCEPTANCE OF COMMUNITY DONATIONS

Acceptance of community (e.g. family, friends, local businesses, etc.) donations (e.g. wood, food, drinks, etc.) are part of Akwesasne’s culture and traditions. However, residents hosting a wake and / or funeral service at their private residence, shall:

- a. Maintain a List of Donations;
- b. Only accept donations from known and viable community sources (e.g. family, friends, local businesses, etc.); and
- c. Graciously refuse left-over food donations from other events (e.g. birthday parties, graduations, other funerals, etc.).

TRADITIONAL FIRE

Any community member who wishes to maintain a “**traditional fire**” at their residence in respect to the deceased, shall do so in accordance to the following protocols:

- a. Delegate a friend or ask for a volunteer to maintain your fire at all times;
- b. Fire shall not be larger than four (4) square feet;
- c. Fire shall be a minimum of **fifty (50) feet away** from the residence;
- d. Only wood or natural fibers (e.g. cardboard, etc.) shall be burned in the fire;
- e. If possible, utilize commercial fire pits / containers to avoid fires getting out of control;
- f. Consider and respect current weather conditions or expected weather patterns that may cause fire to spread (e.g. winds, etc.);
- g. Respect any Community Burn Bans currently in place;
- h. Practice social distancing protocols while sitting around the traditional fire; and
- i. Respect neighboring property lines.

In the event that a home-owner and / or residence that is hosting the wake / funeral service, does not have the sufficient space (e.g. fifty-feet (50-ft) away, etc.) that respects the guidelines identified above, it is recommended that a traditional fire not be created.

SERVICES AT RELIGIOUS FACILITY

For funeral services at any religious facilities (e.g. longhouse, house of worship, temple, church, synagogue, mosques, etc.) such at the St. Regis Catholic Church, please refer to their respective “Denomination Plan for Public Worship” for specific guidance and / or protocols and their more commonly known funeral practices.

IMPORTANT NOTE: All religious facilities have a maximum capacity of fifty (50) people for services. During funeral services, immediate family members of the deceased will be permitted to enter the facility first. When the maximum capacity of fifty (50) people has been reached, no other funeral attendees will be allowed access into the religious facility. Absolutely no exceptions will be considered. Also note, the maximum capacity of fifty (50) people **at the religious facility includes** all religious facility staff, professional funeral representatives and pallbearers.

SERVICES AT AKWESASNE FACILITIES

For funeral services at any designated wake / funeral facilities (e.g. Tri-District Elders, Snye Homemakers, Kateri Hall, etc.) within the territory of Akwesasne, please refer to their respective “Resumption Plan / Re-Opening Plan” for specific guidance and / or protocols and their more commonly known funeral practices.

SERVICES AT THE CEMETERY / BURIAL SITE

Only funeral representatives shall handle the body of the deceased and / or the coffin at the cemetery / burial site. **No** community member shall hand the body of the deceased and / or the coffin at the cemetery / burial site.

TRADITIONAL MEAL SERVICES

Any community member who wishes to deliver meal services, traditional or otherwise, at the wake / funeral service at **their private residence**, whether indoors and / or outdoors, shall enforce the following health and safety measures:

- a. Maintain a group / crowd capacity of no more than **fifty (50)** people;
- b. It is recommended that the traditional meal be reserved for family members only while respecting the capacity limitations;
- c. It is recommended that the family of the deceased designate “food servers” to serve food during meals, unless a caterer provides this service;
- d. All food servers must wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE), (e.g. face masks, gloves, aprons, etc.);
- e. All wake / funeral service providers (e.g. caterers, florists, etc.) entering the residence and / or outdoor gathering areas (e.g. gazebo, pavilion, tent, porches, decks, garages, etc.) must wear personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times;
- f. Avoid serving and / or consuming food and drinks in the same location of the body of the deceased person / coffin;

- g. Avoid serving food and drinks in a buffet-style manner to ensure the health and safety of your family;
- h. Drinks must be provided in manufacturer bottles and cans and delivered to funeral attendees by food servers;
- i. Ensure that all bathrooms and / or porta-potties are continually cleaned, sanitized and stocked (e.g. toilet paper, paper towels, air freshener, etc.);
- j. Ensure that all food servers and services providers (e.g. caterers, etc.) wash their hand thoroughly after utilizing bathrooms and / or porta-potties prior to returning to providing serving duties;
- k. Ensure that all surfaces are continually cleaned and sanitized (e.g. door handles, faucets, cupboards, appliances, tables, chairs, etc.);
- l. Ensure that any excess / surplus food is placed in food storage containers and distributed to family and attendees;
- m. Ensure that social distancing of six (6) feet / two (2) meters is enforced;
- n. Food must be placed in food storage containers with covers and delivered to funeral attendees by food servers;
- o. It is recommended that recycling be part of normal waste disposal processes (e.g. bottles, cans, etc.);
- p. Mandate all wake / funeral attendees to wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE), (e.g. face masks, etc.); and
- q. Practice proper hand hygiene before and after contact with any person.

COVID-19 OUTBREAKS PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES

In the event that the territory of Akwesasne experiences an “official outbreak” as established by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), wakes and funeral services hosted in private residences and / or designated funeral / wake facilities (e.g. Tri District Elders, Snye Homemakers, Kateri Hall, etc.) within the territory of Akwesasne shall cease and this COVID-19 Guidance for Funeral and Bereavement Services will be revised.

CHANGES TO GUIDANCE

This COVID-19 Guidance for Funeral and Bereavement Services is subject to change as new and ever-changing information and data is received through the Ministry / Department of Health.

TRADITIONAL BUNDLE DISTRIBUTION

It is recommended that the distribution of the “traditional bundle” be accommodated by arrangement for the delivery of these bundles to their respective parties.

RECEIPT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is the responsibility of the family member / representative that enters into a contractual agreement with any professional funeral representative for the delivery of funeral / wake services sign and acknowledge the protocols as described within this COVID-19 Guidance for Funeral and Bereavement Services.

COVID-19 Guidance: Funeral and Bereavement Services in the Territory of Akwesasne

Acknowledgement Form

I, _____ have read, understand and
INSERT AND PRINT FAMILY REPRESENTATIVE NAME

acknowledge the protocols identified within the COVID-19 Guidance: Funeral and Bereavement Services within the Territory of Akwesasne and hereby state and affirm that I will ensure that our family, friends and invited guests that participate in a wake and / or funeral service at our private residence, host residence and / or the Akwesasne facilities designated for wake / funeral services shall respect and abide by the protocols that are identified within this Guidance.

I also understand and acknowledge that that our family, friends and invited guests that participate in the wake and / or funeral service will respect and abide by the health and safety measures as prescribed herein.

FAMILY REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

DATE

FUNERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

DATE

PRINT FUNERAL REPRESENTATIVE NAME