



## **Protocol for Funerals and Burials during COVID -19 Pandemic** **Relaxing Phase 2**

### **Background:**

Human coronaviruses are common and are typically associated with mild illnesses, similar to the common cold. The new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by an easily transmittable virus, producing mild to severe respiratory infections, with no treatment or vaccine available at this time.

### **Applicable Public Health Orders:**

The Northwest Territories (NWT) Chief Public Health Officer has issued the following public health orders applicable to Funerals and Burials:

1. Public Health Order – COVID-19 Relaxing Phase 2 (effective June 12, 2020) (hereafter called the “Relaxing Phase 2 Order”); and
2. Public Health Order – COVID-19 Travel Restrictions and Self-Isolation Protocol – As Amended June 15, 2020 (hereafter called the “Travel Restrictions Order”).

Due to the issuance of the Relaxing Phase 2 Order, there is a direct prohibition of holding indoor funerals at this time.

Outdoor funerals and burial services are restricted to 50 persons or less.

Due to the issuance of the Travel Restrictions Order, some next of kin may face challenges having family members or close relations who are not residents of the NWT attend funeral or burial services in a timely manner. Please see the section below entitled, “Out of Territory Procedure” for more details.

### **Notification of Funeral / Burial:**

On the passing of a family member, burial plans or funeral service information must be provided to ProtectNWT for the purpose of processing any related requests with respect to the service, including family members and close relations traveling from out of Territory for the funeral or burial (see below).



### **Out of Territory Procedure:**

If family members or close relations, from outside of the NWT wish to travel within the NWT to attend an outdoor funeral or burial service, they must complete the following:

1. A request for an exceptional circumstance travel exemption approval from the Chief Public Health Officer (OCPHO), in accordance with paragraph 1(m) of the Travel Restrictions Order. As part of this request the following must be submitted to ProtectNWT:
  - a. A Self-Isolation Plan (SIP) document; and
  - b. Funeral / Burial details, including date, community, deceased information.

Once the SIP has been received and reviewed, the OCPHO may then grant the request to travel within the NWT. Travel within the NWT is at the discretion of the OCPHO and an application/request does not guarantee approval.

If approval is granted for family members or close relations from outside the NWT to travel within the NWT, they must:

- a) Go directly into Self-Isolation in one of the 4 named communities with self-isolation centres (Fort Smith, Hay River, Inuvik and Yellowknife). They may be able to isolate with family members or friends in one of the four above-listed communities, so long as this is set out in their self-isolation plan and it is approved by ProtectNWT;
- b) Pay for their Self-Isolation cost. This cost is not covered by the GNWT; the GNWT only provides this service free of charge for residents of the NWT; and
- c) Adhere to the Self-Isolation period (14 days). Once concluded those who isolated may then join family and friends to mourn the loss and continue to the community for the outdoor funeral or burial. If a family member or close relation is self-isolating with family members or friends, those persons may not attend a funeral or burial service until the person self-isolating has completed the Self-Isolation period.

Please take these steps into consideration when planning for the funeral or burial. While officials understand that this is already a difficult time for northern families, the approval process for outside residents to travel within the NWT has been designed for the safety of all northerners living in the NWT. This process may take between 15 and 20 days, from the initial submission of a request to the OCPHO to the time that your family member or close relation completes self-isolation and could attend any approved funeral or burial.



### **Funeral Guidance:**

Funerals are a very difficult time for mourners and family to follow social and physical distancing requirements of 2 meters, or 6 feet from one another. Emotions do run high and will result in an increased risk of spreading the virus via respiratory and bodily secretions, such as through tearing up and blowing your nose touching ones face with an unwashed hand. If your family wishes to allow a viewing of the deceased, you must take reasonable precautions to ensure that all mourners socially distance, use hand sanitizer and do not make contact with others.

The OCPHO sets out the following requirements for small outdoor funerals and burials:

- a) Only immediate family members, close relations or friends may attend, to a maximum of 50 persons including officiant (for example a priest);
- b) The officiant and all participants must observe physical distancing by household group while at the gravesite;
- c) Shared or communal transportation to and from the service must be limited to 25 persons or less so long as physical distancing between household groups is still maintained;
- d) There must be no communal sharing (no buffet or self-serve) of food or beverages;
- e) Hand sanitizer must be provided for all mourners; and
- f) Persons with pre-existing health conditions or COVID-19 symptoms must not attend (symptoms include fever, new or worsening cough, shortness of breath, tiredness, muscle aches, sore throat, runny nose, headache, diarrhea, vomiting, loss of appetite, loss of taste, or loss of smell).

### **Alternatives to a traditional Funeral / Burial:**

The following are examples of acceptable alternative funerals and burials and will always be permitted:

- A funeral was held with immediate family only, and livestreamed to family and friends of the deceased that could not attend in person;
- A funeral mass was provided over community radio to allow the mourners to have a funeral in a safe way; and
- Services have been delayed, where a small funeral was held with family, but a larger memorial will be planned for after the COVID-19 pandemic.