

GUIDELINES FOR FUNERALS IN THE LANGEBERG MUNICIPALITY DURING COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

On 15 March 2020, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, declared a National State of Disaster to respond to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Subsequently, in accordance with government's Risk Adjusted Strategy, various risk levels were introduced and each level had its own set of regulations, all done to mitigate the spread of the virus.

What is evident from these regulations and various pronouncements made by government leaders, is that the way in which we mourn and how we bury our loved ones have changed. Social distancing is the new normal, night vigils are no longer permitted and attendance at funerals is limited to only 50 people.

The purpose of this guide is therefore twofold. On the one hand it is developed to assist grieving families in the planning of funerals during the lockdown and on the other it is also outlining the steps that should be followed in the instance where someone passed on due to COVID-19.

This practical guide summarises various relevant regulations and government directives as well as provincial circulars and guidelines issued by the National Institute for Infectious Diseases and attention is drawn to the fact that this guide is only applicable to funerals to be held within the Langeberg municipal area and burials taking place at any of the 15 municipal cemeteries.

It is developed to explain how the Langeberg Municipality would manage their obligations towards bereaved families as well as how it would manage their responsibilities towards the funeral arrangements and burials during the lockdown.

ADHERENCE TO REGULATIONS

It is important that both families and funeral undertakers acquaint themselves with the different risk levels and the applicable regulations. These regulations might change whenever the alert levels are adjusted as it would determine movements between provinces, metropolitan areas or district municipalities and where to obtain the required permits for traveling to and from funerals.

Section 35 of the Regulations: Alert Level 3 during COVID-19 Lockdown clearly stipulates how funerals should be conducted:

35. (1) Movement between provinces, metropolitan areas or districts by a person intending to attend a funeral is only permitted if the person is a-

- (a) spouse or partner of the deceased;*
- (b) child or grandchild of the deceased, whether biological, adopted, stepchild, or a foster child;*
- (c) child-in-law of the deceased;*
- (d) parent of the deceased whether biological, adopted or stepparent;*
- (e) sibling, whether biological, adopted or stepbrother or sister of the deceased; or*
- (f) grandparent of the deceased;*

(2) Attendance at a funeral is limited to 50 persons and is not regarded as a prohibited gathering.

(3) Night vigils are prohibited.

(4) During a funeral, all health protocols and social distancing measures must be adhered to, in order to limit exposure of persons at the funeral to COVID-19.

(5) Each person, whether traveling alone or not, wishing to attend a funeral and who has to travel between metropolitan areas, districts, or between provinces must obtain a permit which corresponds substantially with Form 4 of Annexure A, from his or her nearest magistrate's office or police station to travel to the funeral and back.

(6) The head of court, or a person designated by him or her, or a station commander of a police station or a person designated by him or her, may issue the permit to travel to a funeral.

(7) Upon a request for a permit to attend a funeral, a person requesting a permit must produce a death certificate or a certified copy of the death certificate to the head of court, or a person designated by him or her, or a station commander of a police station or a person designated by him or her: If a death certificate is not yet available, and the funeral must be held within 24 hours in keeping with cultural or religious practices, the person requesting the permit must make a sworn affidavit which corresponds with Form 5 of Annexure A, and also provide a letter from a cultural or religious leader confirming the need for the funeral to take place within 24 hours.

(8) Only two family members of the deceased may, with the required permits, travel in the vehicle transporting the mortal remains to the metropolitan area, district, or province where the funeral will take place if the cause of death of the deceased being transported is non-COVID-19 related: Provided that the health protocols and social distancing measures are adhered to.

(9) The provisions of regulation 43 must be strictly adhered to when travelling.

(10) A copy of the permit issued and the death certificate or sworn affidavit made, must be kept safely by the head of court, or station commander of a police station, for record keeping for a period of three months after the national state of disaster has ended, where-after it may be destroyed.

(11) All Forms must be completed in full, including full names, identification or passport numbers and full contact details as required in the Form.

(12) A Form that is not completed in full as required by sub-regulation (11) is invalid.

It is the responsibility of the family and the funeral undertakers to ensure that these regulations are met and adhered to and to work with the local police and law enforcement authorities.

While these regulations apply to all funerals, the Direction 8G of the Directions to Address, Prevent and Combat the Spread of COVID-19, issued by the Department of Health in Government Notice 457 of 2020, deals specifically with funerals of people who died as a result of COVID-19.

CEMETERIES

As mentioned earlier, these guidelines are only applicable to burials and funerals that take place in the Langeberg municipal area.

There are 15 cemeteries in the municipality and while the capacity might vary, there is no specifically designated cemetery for those who passed on due to COVID-19.

Families are encouraged to work with their selected funeral undertaker to ensure that all paperwork is submitted and payments are made timeously to ensure no disruptions with their respective funeral arrangements.

Families or undertakers do not need to visit any of our offices but are encouraged to contact the municipality via email or telephonically.

Undertakers must pay for the grave via EFT to the Langeberg Municipality account (see attached banking details) and the proof of payment and required documentation must be emailed to bookings@langeberg.gov.za.

Once this payment has been confirmed, the relevant supervisor will issue a grave number.

Undertakers may also request that a grave be closed with a digger/loader at the approved tariffs in order to minimize handling of tools or mourners may close the graves themselves provided that the spades are sanitized every time there is a changeover.

NAME OF FACILITY	LOCATION	CONTACT	COST INCL VAT
Cogmanskloof Cemetery	Cogmanskloof, Ashton	Esley Skade 023 615 8000	Bricking of a single grave Actual Cost + 20%
Conradiedorp Cemetery	Ashton		Bricking of a double grave Actual Cost + 20%
Silo's Cemetery	Ashton		Single grave (dig by Municipality) R602.00
Zolani Cemetery	Zolani, Ashton		
Town (Dorp) Cemetery	Forest Street, Bonnievale	Michiel Rabie 023 616 8000	Double grave (dig by Municipality) R1,147.00
New Cemetery	Forest Street, Bonnievale		Single grave (dig by yourself) R175.00
Happy Valley Cemetery	New Cross Street, Happy Valley, Bonnievale		Building permit (Laying of tombstones) R289.00
McGregor Cemetery	Tindall Street, McGregor	Selena Adonis 023 626 8200	Opening of graves R493.00
Ashbury Cemeteries (Old and New)	Muskadel Street, Montagu	Willem Mouries 023 614 8000	Closing of graves R493.00
Golf Course Cemetery	Montagu		Opening of graves (after hours) R1006.00
Buitekant Street Cemetery	Buitekant Street, Montagu		Closing of graves (after hours) R1006.00
Droëheuwel Cemetery	Heuwel Street, Robertson North	Selena Adonis 023 626 8200	Wall of Remembrance (per opening) R567.00
Nqkubela Cemeteries (Old and New)	Mabombo Street, Nqkubela, Robertson		
White Street Cemetery	White Street, Robertson South		

DISPOSAL OF HUMAN REMAINS

Apart from knowing and understanding the different risk alert levels and the accompanied regulations, funeral undertakers should familiarize themselves with the Directions to Address, Prevent and Combat the Spread of COVID-19, issued by the Department of Health in Government Notice 457 of 2020 as well as Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the Human Remains Regulations, Regulation No. 363 of 22 May 2013.

While the usual practices would apply if someone passes on due to any other cause, Direction 8 of the Directions to Address, Prevent and Combat the Spread of COVID-19 deals extensively with how the human remains of someone who passed on due to COVID-19 should be treated.

It makes it very clear that persons handling Covid-19 remains should wear suitable personal protective clothing at all times, practice good personal hygiene and that no one should at any time touch or kiss the human remains.

When a person passes on at home

In the case where a person infected with COVID-19 dies at home, Direction 8C stipulates that “family members must not at any stage, handle the body. An EMS must be called immediately to confirm death before removal by an undertaker”. There are also clear provisions on how the belongings of the deceased should be removed and how it should be cleaned.

COVID-19 natural death in a community

Circular 41 of 2020, issued by the Head of the Western Cape Department of Health on 30 March 2020, stipulates what steps to follow when someone with COVID-19 passes on in the community:

- 8.1. EMS performs the death declaration.
- 8.2. SAPS complete the SAPS 180 form.
- 8.3. The next of kin is instructed to contact an undertaker to facilitate collection of the human remains.
- 8.4. During the initial phases of the health service response, Forensic Pathology Services is dispatched on request of an undertaker to assist in the double bagging and decontamination of the outer bag for the safe transportation of the human remains. The undertaker is to be present whilst this occurs and to take responsibility for all property and valuables. The deceased will be transported from the scene in the undertaker's vehicle.
- 8.5. The relevant Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP) in the municipal district is dispatched to ensure that the handling of the human remains is strictly monitored by the EHP throughout the process.
- 8.6. The undertaker collects the human remains under the supervision of the relevant EHP in the district where the patient died.

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

The municipality will meet all its obligations to all families who are going through this difficult time and would assist where it can to ensure that all arrangements are made without any disruption and delay.

During this time, all COVID-19 related funerals in the Langeberg municipal area will take place during office hours, on weekdays only and within 3 days, as required by the Western Cape Department of Health. For other funerals, families may exercise a choice to hold a funeral service over a weekend, as long as all health requirements, relating to the management of the Funeral Regulations, are met.

No community halls will be available for funeral services.

An attendance register of all mourners, stating full names, ID numbers, addresses and contact phone numbers must be kept and submitted to the municipality for contact tracing purposes.

The local SAPS office must be informed of all funeral services taking place.

The Western Cape Health Department, in Circular H49/2020, advises that all attempts should be made to bury a deceased who passed away from confirmed or suspected COVID-19, within three days, if there is no indication for a postmortem examination. Direction 8I of the Directions to Address, Prevent and Combat the Spread of COVID-19 stipulates that non-COVID-19 mortal remains must be buried or cremated within ten days from the date of death.

In the case of a COVID-19 death, the Guidelines for Case-finding, Diagnosis, Management and Public Health Response in SA, compiled by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases and the National Department of Health “strongly recommends that the remains be cremated”.

DAY OF COVID-19 FUNERAL

Direction 8E states that “a funeral undertaker must deliver the mortal remains on the morning of burial and not the night before the burial and must ensure that the remains are not touched during viewing”.

Direction 8G outlines what should happen in case someone passed on due to Covid-19:

- (1) Cremation is highly recommended where a person has passed on due to COVID-19.*
- (2) A burial or cremation of the mortal remains of a person who died of COVID-19 must be carried out in terms of the Human Remains Regulations.*
- (3) (a) Burial services should be as short as possible but may not exceed two hours in order to minimise possible exposure.*
(b) Mourners should observe physical distancing during and after the burial service.
- (4) Only close family members should attend a funeral service of a person that died of COVID-19 or of other infectious disease.*
- (5) For the purposes of protecting the health of the mourners at a burial service, a COVID-19 patient should not attend a burial service irrespective of his or her relationship with the deceased.*
- (6) Those tasked with placing the body in the grave, on the funeral pyre, etc. should wear gloves and wash hands with soap and water once the burial is complete.*

We strongly recommend strongly that facilities for washing of hands be available both at the religious premises where funeral services would take place as well as the grave site.

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CONCLUSION

This guide was never meant to be exhaustive. As mentioned in the introduction, it was merely compiled to give clear instructions on how we as a municipality would help bereaved families during this time, on the new arrangements for funerals and burials during the lockdown and how we as an administration would respond.

We understand that planning the funeral of a loved one during these uncertain times can be scary and with added regulations in place, it can even be confusing. We hope that this guide would put your mind at ease and explain, in simple terms, how you can do everything within the ambit of the law and how we can assist you in doing so.

FORM 4
PERMIT TO TRAVEL TO ANOTHER PROVINCE/METROPOLITAN AREA/DISTRICT FOR A
FUNERAL
 Regulations 18(5)

(To be completed by the head of court or a station commander or a person designated by him or her respectively.)

I, _____ (full names of *head of court, or a person designated by him or her / station commander of a police station or a person designated by him or her) for—

(a) the Magistrate's court for the district of _____;

(b) the police station at _____,

hereby issue this permit for travel to another district/province, to the following person:

Full names:					
Surname:					
Identity number					
Address of place of residence:					
Province of residence:					
Contact details:	Cell nr		Tel No (h)		e-mail address
Metropolitan area/district travelling to:					
Province travelling to:					
Date of funeral:					

I also declare that the above-mentioned person presented the *death certificate/certified copy of the death certificate/affidavit to me.

Signed at _____ this _____ day of _____ 2020.

 *Person issuing permit

Official stamp

FORM 5
SWORN AFFIDAVIT BY PERSON WHO WISHES TO ATTEND A FUNERAL IN ANOTHER
PROVINCE/METROPOLITAN AREA/DISTRICT
 Regulations 18(7)

- Note: 1.** A person giving false information on this affidavit shall be guilty of an offence and, on conviction, liable to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months or to both such fine and imprisonment.
- 2.** This affidavit may only be sworn to or affirmed at a magistrate's court or police station.

I,

Full names:					
Surname:					
Identity number					
Address of place of residence:					
Province of residence:					
Contact details:	Cell nr		Tel No (h)		e-mail address
District of funeral:					
Province in which funeral will take place:					

Hereby declare under oath with regards to the deceased:

Names of deceased:				
Surname of deceased:				
Relationship/Affiliation to the deceased (eg spouse/parent)				
I am not in possession of the death certificate for the reasons set out, and a copy of the letter from a cultural or religious leader is attached:	Yes		No	
Date of funeral:				
Province in which funeral will take place:				
*City/town/village of funeral:				

***OATH/AFFIRMATION**

I, _____ (full names), identity number _____, hereby declare under *oath/affirmation that the above-mentioned information is true and correct.

Signed at _____ on this _____ day of _____ 2020.

Signature of person making affidavit

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that before administering the *oath/taking the affirmation, I asked the deponent the following questions and noted *his/her answers in *his/her presence as indicated below:

(a) Do you know and understand the contents of the above declaration?

Answer: _____

(b) Do you have any objection to taking the *oath/affirmation?

Answer: _____

I Do you consider the *oath/affirmation to be binding on your conscience?

Answer: _____

I hereby certify that the deponent has acknowledged that *he/she knows and understands the content of this declaration which was *sworn to/affirmed before me, and the deponent's signature was placed thereon in my presence.

Signed at _____ this _____ day of _____ 2020

*Justice of the Peace/Commissioner of Oaths

Full names: _____

Designation: _____

Business address: _____

*Delete which is not applicable".