

# One of Your Loved Ones Has Died from COVID-19

## What Do You Need to Know? What Should You Do?

First of all, the members of the administration of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS) and the Nunavik Department of Public Health wish to offer you their sincere condolences and express their profound sadness at the loss of your loved one. We understand the importance of being near your loved ones during this difficult period and dealing as peacefully as possible with your grief.

However, due to the seriousness of the COVID-19 disease and the risk of contagion, it is essential to apply certain measures to protect the health of the deceased's family, friends and community members as well as that of the medical personnel. In effect, given that the deceased's body constitutes a risk for transmission of the virus, funeral rites cannot be carried out as usual and gatherings must be organized differently. This situation is exceptional and provisional. Rest assured that we will support you the best we can in spite of the circumstances.





The present document describes the important measures recommended by the Nunavik Department of Public Health in order to protect the population and at the same time respond as much as possible to the needs of grieving families who wish to honour the memory of the deceased.

This document will be updated as necessary, according to the evolution of the pandemic situation and advances in knowledge in this area.

## Why are exceptional measures necessary?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a highly contagious virus that affects the respiratory tracts and spreads from person to person. It can cause severe illness and even death, particularly among vulnerable persons:

- individuals aged 60 years and older;
- individuals with a chronic health problem (e.g., pulmonary disease, diabetes, asthma);
- individuals with a condition that weakens their immune system (e.g., those who have received an organ transplant, those undergoing cancer treatment).

As it is a new virus, no one is immune and anyone can be infected. There is presently no medication or vaccine against the disease. Prevention therefore remains the best way of protecting yourself and others.

## How does the virus spread?

The virus spreads primarily through droplets of respiratory secretions from an infected individual, especially when he<sup>1</sup> coughs or sneezes. However, even individuals without symptoms can be carriers and can thus be contagious.

Transmission can also occur through contact with infected surfaces if an individual touches her mouth, nose or eyes with her hands.

The virus can also be found in stools and blood. **The bodies of the deceased can transmit the virus and therefore constitute a public-health risk.**

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<sup>1</sup> In the interest of simplicity, the masculine or feminine form is used in this text to denote either sex.

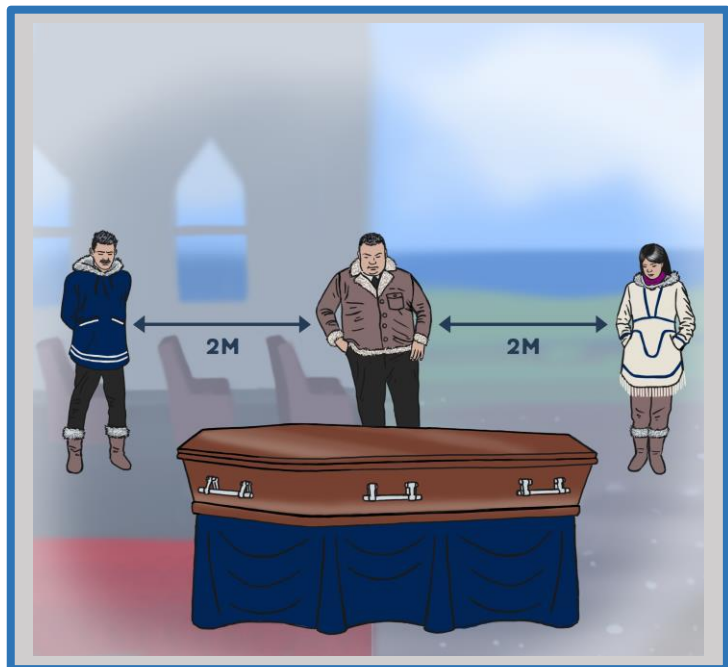
## What preventive and protective measures should apply during preparation of the body and organization of funerals?

If one of your loved ones has died from COVID-19, certain measures must be respected in order to avoid transmission of the virus and to protect the family, friends and community members, particularly the most vulnerable persons.

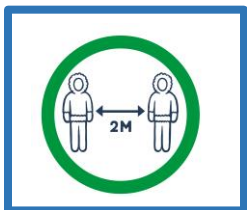
The Nunavik Department of Public Health has formulated recommendations adapted from those of the public-health authorities of Québec in order to respect Inuit traditions and customs as much as possible. These are temporary measures that could be lifted or modified according to the evolution of the pandemic situation. The recommendations are as follows:

- Handling of the body and disinfection of surfaces must be carried out with additional precautions. The body must be placed in a sealed body bag, then in a coffin that must remain closed until burial. Any person who touches or comes close to the body must be adequately protected, particularly by wearing a mask, eye protection, waterproof overclothing and gloves. Donning and removing such equipment requires prior training. For those reasons, the Nunavik Department of Public Health recommends that those actions be performed by the trained personnel of the health centre (Tulattavik or Inuulitsivik) or the CLSC.
- Given the risk of contagion, rituals involving direct contact with the body, such as preparation of the body (dressing, etc.), are not permitted. For loved ones who wish to perform a ritual that requires no contact with the body (such as prayers in the presence of the deceased), a specific agreement may be possible with the Nunavik Department of Public Health.
- Before being returned to the family, the deceased's personal effects (clothing, towels and other) must be placed in quarantine for a seven-day period or machine washed in hot water and the usual detergent.
- The deceased's coffin may be exposed (but must remain closed) for no more than two periods of a maximum of 3 hours in the 48-hour period following death, with an interval of at least 3 hours during which the body must be placed under refrigeration.
- The coffin may not be transported to a private home for viewing.

- In the case of a COVID-19 death outside Nunavik, funeral-services businesses will not proceed with embalming. There are then two possibilities for repatriating the body to the home community in Nunavik: the body may be cremated or the body may be placed in a sturdy, sealed coffin (Air Inuit or Canadian North must, however, accept to transport it beforehand). **The Nunavik Department of Public Health strongly recommends that the families of deceased agree to cremation where possible.** The ashes of a deceased person do not constitute a risk of transmitting the disease and can be transported by air without restriction. In cases where the family absolutely insists on burial of the body, the coffin will be sealed to ensure impossibility of opening it.
- Burial must take place as quickly as possible.
- The principles of physical distancing must be respected at all times by maintaining a minimum distance of two metres (six feet) between persons.
- Moreover, if restrictions on get-togethers are in force or if there are active COVID-19 cases in the community (non-COVID-FREE community), the number of visitors should be limited to four or five persons, if possible exclusively to the immediate family.
- Any gathering after the funeral, including public feasts, might need to be cancelled or postponed, according to the Nunavik recommendations relative to indoor and outdoor get-togethers in public places.
- Any person with cold- or flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, fatigue) or who is vulnerable to the disease must abstain from attending the ceremonies.



- Hugging, handshaking and kissing must be avoided. Greet from a distance, with a nod and a hand over the heart.



- The Nunavik Department of Public Health reminds you that basic hygiene measures must be followed at all times:

- If you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with your elbow or a tissue and discard the tissue in a waste container.



- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based disinfectant and avoid touching your face.

## How do you offer condolences to the deceased's loved ones?

Below are some suggestions for extending sympathies to grieving persons:

- Say prayers at home (without visitors);
- Light a *qulliq* in memory of the deceased;
- Send prayers and words of encouragement to the family and friends via Facebook, text messages or e-mail;
- Hold a video chat with the family and friends via applications such as Facebook *Messenger*, *Skype*, *WhatsApp*, *Google Hangout* or *Zoom*.



## Where can you turn for help?

The death of a loved one due to the COVID-19 disease can provoke all sorts of emotions in grieving persons. Do not hesitate to learn more about grieving and to seek support from friends and loved ones in your community. You can also consult psychosocial resources available in Nunavik:

 [http://nrbhss.ca/sites/default/files/covid19/Psychosocial\\_Support\\_04-28-2020.pdf](http://nrbhss.ca/sites/default/files/covid19/Psychosocial_Support_04-28-2020.pdf)

The administration and all the personnel of the NRBHSS wish to highlight the importance of respecting the directives and cooperating as a community in order to protect the population and prevent the virus from spreading in our region. We hope you find the support and comfort you need to get through these difficult times in harmony and serenity.

**For more information on the coronavirus disease:**

<https://www.facebook.com/NunavikHealthBoard/>

<https://nrbhss.ca/en/coronavirus>