



T'it'q'et Administration

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T'IT'Q'ET – TEMPORARY FUNERAL PROTOCOLS – COVID-19

PURPOSE:

To enact T'it'q'et Funeral Protocols to take effect during the COVID-19 Crisis. These protocols will help to ensure the safety of T'it'q'et members and residents dealing with funeral ceremonies during COVID-19. These Funeral Protocols will be lifted when the Provincial Health Officer lifts the restrictions on group gathering size and physical distancing requirements.

CURRENT SITUATION:

On March 23, 2020, T'it'q'et activated the Emergency Operation Center in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 27, 2020, the T'it'q'et Declaration of State of Emergency within T'it'q'et was enacted by Chief and Council. In planning for the COVID-19 Crisis, it was recognized that establishing T'it'q'et Funeral Protocols was of high priority. Therefore, the following outlines the T'it'q'et approach to funerals during COVID-19.

T'ITQ'ET FUNERAL PROTOCOLS DURING COVID-19

Traditional and Western Funeral Practices

The T'it'q'et Chief and Council acknowledges that each family has their own Traditional and Western funeral practices during normal circumstances. During this COVID-19 pandemic, however, Traditional and Western funeral practices may not be safe. It is therefore essential that T'it'q'et families find unique and innovative ways to adapt our Traditional and Western protocols to ensure the safety of family members, friends, and community as a whole.

Spiritual Practices

It is important to acknowledge the spiritual journey of those that pass on and enter the spirit world by continuing certain traditional practices which may still be incorporated and adjusted during COVID-19. Traditional practices may be performed or offered by individuals while maintaining physical distancing in innovative ways.

Mass Gatherings Cancellation

The Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, by order, cancelled mass gatherings of more than 50 people until May 30, 2020, at which time the order will be re-assessed. This cancellation of mass gathering is meant to reduce the numbers of people being infected by COVID-19. Interactions amongst people contributes to the transmission of respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19. No person is safe from infection, however, the populations most at risk for having poor outcomes are Elders and/or individual with pre-existing conditions.



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Difficult Times – Difficult Decisions

T'it'q'et Chief and Council acknowledge that this is a difficult time and funerals during this time are even more traumatic for the family and community. As such, these guidelines need to be followed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among our community members. We are all responsible for keeping our people safe, including during times of mourning.

Plan to proceed with a funeral during COVID-19

- 1. Number Of people attending:** Although the Provincial Health Officer states that no gatherings over 50 people may be held, best practice calls for not more than 5-10 people to gather outside of individuals residing in each household; all groups of 5 -10 people must practice physical distancing (no contact within 2 meters (6 Feet) of another person). As such, T'it'q'et Chief and Council requires that families apply best practice limiting funerals to no more than 5-10 immediate relatives in attendance following physical distancing measures in place. (Note: people living in the same household who are not ill, are exempt from this 2-meter guideline.)
- 2. People attending:** People attending funeral ceremonies must not be: sick; in contact with sick people; must not have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days; and should not reside with an Elder, people with significant chronic disease or compromised immune system. This protocol requests that only limited travel to funeral services be encouraged by means of having only immediate relatives who live locally. Larger gatherings may be held when the safety orders and advisories have been lifted. “Immediate Relatives” means mother, father, spouse, common-law spouse, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandparent or equivalent in-law or any other person who has been living under the same roof as the deceased.
- 3. Avoid Contact:** do not hug, shake hands, or have any human contact in order to limit transmission of COVID-19 - keep 6 feet (2 meters) apart. Do not touch your face and cough or sneeze into tissue or the bend of your arm. Dispose of tissue in lined waste baskets followed by proper hand washing. If handwashing is not available, use hand sanitizer.
- 4. Public Areas Disinfected:** for those few people taking care of funeral ceremonies, please ensure that all public areas (kitchen, bathroom, and common areas) are disinfected throughout the day. Disinfectant (1:50 bleach disinfectant solution). Pay particular attention to surfaces that are touched often.
- 5. Plan for those who become sick on site:** Have Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on hand in case someone becomes sick on site. Have a plan to isolate them and move them to safety to prevent transmission.



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Hygiene stations: have hand sanitizer and hand washing stations with lined waste baskets, soap, and paper towel dispensers on site, hand washing signage to promote proper and constant cleansing of hands.

7. **Funeral Wake:** Traditionally, a funeral wake is held over a four-day period however, during the time of COVID-19, we ask that funeral wakes be limited to one day with burial on the second day.
8. **Funeral Location:** if possible, have funeral ceremonies outdoors as there is higher ventilation and greater capacity for separation between attendees.
9. **Cleansing the Body:** T'it'q'et Chief and Council acknowledge this is a Traditional practice, but due to COVID-19, Council recommends omitting this stage by the family, particularly if the death is due to COVID-19.
10. **Viewing:** Prohibition of viewing of the loved one during COVID-19 unless strict physical distancing measures are in place and enforced.
11. **No Feast/Food –Instead have Food Offering:** Cancel feast and do not distribute food during COVID-19 funeral ceremonies. Consider doing a food, water and tobacco offering rather than a feast.
12. **Communication:** Ensure that those few people (recommended 5-10 people) attending the funeral have clear understandings of these COVID-19 funeral protocols and that everyone follows the precautions needed to ensure the safety of all thereby limiting the potential of virus transmission.
13. **Funeral Options**
 - a. *Spiritual Practices:* With physical distancing (2 Meters/6 Feet) measures in place and/or as individuals, spiritual practices may be performed such as smudging, cleansing the home, fire keeping in shifts (for the day), offering prayers, drumming/singing individually, connect with Elder via phone, and/or offering medicines to the fire or water.
 - b. *Cremation:* T'it'q'et Chief and Council acknowledges that some community members may or may not believe in, and/or practice cremation, but we encourage this practice until the COVID-19 Crisis is over.
 - c. *Streaming the Ceremony:* Idea; utilize technology and stream the minimal funeral services to extended family and friends so they can watch from the safety of their own home.
 - d. *Future Ceremony:* T'it'q'et Chief and Council recommends that when the Provincial Health Officer ends the ban on mass gatherings and it is safe for communities and community members to gather, that individuals who have passed during the time of



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the COVID-19 crisis be held up in a ceremony in accordance with the family's and community's Traditional and/or Western funeral practices.

Any concerns or questions about your health call *811 or go to www.fnha.ca/coronavirus.

Approved by T'it'q'et Council at a duly convened meeting of Council.

SIGNED, On Behalf of T'it'q'et Council

DATE


Councilor

April 20, 2020

T'it'q'et would like to recognize the Secwepemc Health Caucus for permission granted to adapt their Protocol to suit T'it'q'etmec traditions and culture.