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GUIDANCE FOR CONDUCTING MEMORIAL SERVICES DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

This guidance is designed to assist those handling memorial services during the COVID-19 emergency in light of Proclamation 38 JBE 2020 issued on March 31, 2020.

If possible, conduct direct burial or cremation, with a memorial service for the deceased to follow after the COVID-19 risks have abated.

- It is crucial for interments or cremations to continue during this emergency because the remains cannot continue to take up much-needed storage space while families wait for the ability to conduct a full commemoration service.
- Under Louisiana law (La. R.S. 8:651), burials or cremations must occur “within a reasonable time” after death. A reasonable time during this emergency, pursuant to CDC guidance, is three (3) days. If this short delay is impractical, final disposition may occur later, but must occur within 10 days if the remains have been properly embalmed or refrigerated. If embalming or refrigeration has not occurred, Louisiana law mandates burial or cremation within 30 hours (La. R.S. 37:848(D)).

If some memorial must be held during the stay-at-home and social distancing periods, then:

- Funeral services (at the place of worship or funeral home) should be limited to no more than 10 people.
- Funeral homes and places of worship must counsel families on the need to limit memorial size to save lives and to protect the health of others.
- At funeral services and at a cemetery, funeral/clergy/cemetery staff should be limited to bare minimum to allow for immediate family and mourners to be present (still in total numbers of staff and family of 10 or fewer).
- Any additional funeral/clergy/cemetery staff necessary to prepare an event should accomplish their tasks before or after the family arrives and departs so as to avoid too many people gathering.
- If additional staff (exceeding the limit of 10 people, including family and mourners) is necessary to conduct a funeral or graveside committal, such staff should remain at a distance of six or more feet from the family and mourners.
- In no event should a place of worship, funeral home, or cemetery authorize a “walking visitation” or continuous streams or groups of mourners to attend a funeral or graveside service. Though such approaches would appear to comply

with the gathering restrictions, they actually constitute similar risks as do large gatherings.

- In order to avoid large gatherings occurring at place of worship, funeral homes, or cemeteries, obituaries should contain language akin to the following:
 - “There will be an invitation-only family service not to exceed 10 people at a viewing, memorial/religious service or graveside service due to the restrictions of the current COVID-19 pandemic. When the situation allows, a celebration of his (or her) life will be held for his (or her) many friends and family.”
- Local law enforcement should be used to enforce the gathering size limitations.

There is currently no authorization for direct cremations. In other words, a family cannot be forced to cremate, subject to the limited authority of coroners and the Office of Public Health to so order. All funeral home, clergy, and cemetery staff should exercise social distancing guidelines when conducting any memorializations during the COVID-19 emergency and should use personal protective equipment as directed by the CDC when coming into direct contact with the remains of a COVID-19-positive decedent.