



# Sumas First Nation Semá:th

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## PURPOSE:

To enact a Semá:th First Nation Funeral Protocol to take effect during the COVID 19 Crisis. This protocol will help to ensure the safety of our nation members dealing with funerals during COVID 19. The Funeral Protocol will be lifted when the Provincial Health Officer lifts the restrictions on mass and/or group gatherings.

## CURRENT SITUATION:

The Province of British Columbia has declared a state of emergency to combat the COVID 19. On March 16, 2020, Provincial Health Officer Bonnie Henry issued a Notice prohibiting large gatherings of people.

The Council of the Semá:th First Nation considers it necessary for the health and safety of the membership to restrict gatherings of members and other persons on-reserve so long as there is a provincial emergency.

Please note: The Semá:th First Nation Funeral Protocol does not supersede any Community protocols but should be considered in addition with the more stringent standard being recommended.

## Traditional and Western Funeral Practices

The Semá:th First Nation acknowledge that each family may have their own Traditional and Western funeral practices that they abide by in normal circumstances. During COVID 19 we may not implement these Traditional and Western funeral practices but find unique and innovative ways to adapt our Traditional and Western protocols.

## Spiritual Practices

It is important to acknowledge the spiritual journey of those that pass on and enter the spirit world by continuing our traditional practices which can still be incorporated during COVID 19. Traditional practices can be performed or offered by individuals with physical distancing in innovative ways where we can honor and respect the spirit of the individual during this unprecedented time.

### Mass Gatherings Cancellation

The Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry by order cancelled mass gatherings of more than 50 people until May 30, 2020, when it will be re-assessed. This cancellation of mass gathering is to reduce the number of people being infected by COVID 19. Interaction with people contributes to the transmission of respiratory illnesses such as COVID 19 with Elders and/or individual with pre-existing conditions being most at risk for poor outcomes. This order may change at any time by the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry.

### Difficult Times – Difficult Decisions

The Semá:th First Nation acknowledge this is a difficult time and a funeral during this time is even more traumatic. As such, these guidelines need to be recommended to prevent the spread of COVID 19 among our community and nation members. We need to keep our people safe.

1. Mourning Time: Traditionally mourning occurs within a four-day cycle but during the time of COVID we ask that mourning take place within one day.
2. Funeral Location: if possible, have funeral outdoors as there is higher ventilation and greater capacity for separation between attendees outside.
3. Cleansing and dressing the Body: The SFN acknowledge this is a Traditional practice but due to COVID 19 recommend omitting this stage by the family if death is due to COVID 19.
4. Viewing: Ban viewing of the Body during COVID 19 unless strict physical distancing measures are in place and enforced.
5. No Feast/Food Instead, have Food Offering: Cancel feast and allow no food during COVID 19 for one day funeral practices. Consider doing a food, water and tobacco offering rather than a feast.
6. Communication: Ensure that those limited people (recommended up to 15 people) attending the funeral have clear understandings of the COVID 19 funeral protocols and all the precautions that are needed to ensure everybody's safety and to reduce the virus transmission. It is strongly recommended that all persons practice safe social distancing to protect yourself and those around you.
7. Prevention Practices: It is important to adhere to the social distancing guidelines by keep about 2 meters away from a people. To reduce the risk of transmission COVID 19 wear disposable gloves and a face mask. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Using soap and water is the single most effective way to reduce the spread of infection. If a sink is not available, you can use alcohol-based hand rubs (ABHR) to clean your hands. Do not touch your face, eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. Do not share food, drinks, utensils, etc.

8. Funeral Options

- a. Spiritual Practices: With physical distancing 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: SFN acknowledges that some families 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: 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: The SFN recommend that when the Provincial Health Officer cease bans on mass gatherings and it is safe for communities and nation members to gather, that individuals that have passed during the time of the COVID 19 crisis be held up in ceremony as per the direction of the community's Traditional and/or Western funerals practices  
Any concerns or questions about your health call \*811 or go to [www.fnha.ca/coronavirus](http://www.fnha.ca/coronavirus).


Should you have questions regarding the funeral protocol contact Chief Dalton Silver at 604-751-0947 or Wendy Phair at 778-347-3705.

SIGNED BY:

DATE

April 24, 2020

  
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Chief Dalton Silver

  
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Councillor Murray Ned

  
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Councillor Clint Tuttle

  
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Councillor Christopher Silver