



4. All attending should don masks of some sort.
5. No canopies will be permitted during funerals. During inclement weather umbrellas that were sanitized in advance may be provided by funeral homes.
6. Chairs should not be provided at cemeteries.
7. Operationally, the graveside service should be conducted as follows:
  - a. The casket will be carried and lowered into the grave by the funeral director/assistants or other cemetery staff or by the officiating rabbi (if needed), after which cemetery staff will step back from the grave until the completion of the short graveside service.
  - b. At this point, a brief service should commence -- including only the essential and necessary components (as per each denominational tradition). All other components should be reserved for a post-burial live-streamed funeral service which both the family, mourners and public can take part in - including eulogies and alike (see below).
  - c. The tradition of shoveling of dirt may continue (at the discretion of the officiant) provided that gloves are handed out to a limited group of shovellers and the shovel is wiped down between services. Alternate shoveling opportunities may also be provided including disposable paper cups for mourners to cast dirt onto the grave or spades.
  - d. After the shovelling, all parties should immediately depart the area of the grave and cemetery. No one should not linger, congregate or converse. This will enable the cemetery professionals to apply the vault cover (when applicable) and complete the filling in of the grave.
    - i. To help facilitate this, as described below, a post-burial virtual service should be scheduled for the mourners to leave to.
  - e. No in-person shiva gatherings nor minyanim should be convened.
  - f. These guidelines do not envision a difference between COVID-19 deaths and other deaths.

Furthermore, in recognizing the unique times we are operating in and the unchanging needs of a grieving family, the GHRA recommends and endorses the following practices surrounding the loss of a loved one and the actual burial.

1. The speedy and undelayed burial of the deceased as is expected by Jewish Law.
2. The utilization of live streaming at the graveside burial via Zoom or any other platform.
  - a. We ask our dedicated local funeral directors to help ensure a viable internet connection by making a mobile hotspot device available for such purposes, if possible.
3. The facilitating, creation and running of post-burial virtual funeral services for loved ones, families and friends.

4. The reincorporation of a shiva (7-day intense mourning period) ritual. The current times do not prohibit observing the practice of shiva. Mourners upon whom the obligation of Shiva applies should be encouraged to observe shiva by returning to their homes, or wherever they are sheltering in place, and performing the required customs of Shiva (as per their denominational traditions including Seudat Havra'ah (the mourners meal), Ner Neshama (7-day candle), sitting on a low chair, etc.)
5. Mourners should be encouraged to utilize the blessings of today to connect without physical contact and Rabbis should create opportunities for distanced tele Shiva visits via telephone, Facetime, Zoom, etc.

As we seek to address this ever changing situation, we, the rabbinic leadership of the Greater Hartford Jewish community, would like to declare and state plainly that these current limitations on the “normal” burial and shiva protocol does not in any way deprive our departed loved ones of the honor and dignity they deserve and are afforded by our tradition. Many of the rituals around funerals and burials are not absolute obligations but rather matters of custom. In seeing to it that our loved ones are properly buried and doing so in a way that continues to protect the living is truly the most esteemed way to honor our deceased loved ones during this time.

The great Halakhist (Jewish Legal thinker) Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1804–1886) in his magnum opus the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* (26:22) opined in addressing reciting the Kaddish Yatom (Mourners’ Kaddish):

"Though Kaddish and prayers are helpful to the departed, they are not of primary importance. What is most essential is that their children (and loved ones) proceed in the path of righteousness and, in that manner, bring merit to their parents and memory...A person should command his children to be scrupulous in the observance of a particular mitzvah (commandment). Their practice of it will be considered more important than their recitation of Kaddish."

At this time, one of the most important commandments we are all entrusted with is the obligation to protect ourselves and others from the spread of this Coronavirus. God willing, through our diligent efforts may we not only merit a quick global recovery from this pandemic but also elevate the memory of our loved ones through our efforts.

These guidelines are effective immediately, subject to change and will be suspended upon the termination of current restrictions by local and federal authorities; they have been adopted by the Greater Hartford Rabbinical Association on April 14, 2020 in agreement with the chair of Association of Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Hartford (AJC) at the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, with US Cemeteries and our local funeral homes.

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*The Greater Hartford Rabbinical Association (GHRA) represents the diverse rabbinic leadership of Judaism's many branches in the Greater Hartford area and serves as a rabbinic voice in and for the Jewish community and the Greater Hartford community. It supports its rabbis in their personal and professional growth, develops and nourishes collegial relationships within the association, and guides the Greater Hartford area in making religious decisions for our community.*