

Update from Ministry of Justice

The [Coronavirus Bill](#) was introduced to Parliament on 19 March 2020.

The key aims of this emergency legislation are to support service providers whilst continuing to treat the bereaved with care and compassion and ensuring dignity and respect for the deceased.

While the Bill is still subject to parliamentary discussion and agreement, so nothing is yet agreed, we can set out the proposals contained therein. The Bill is expected to move through the legislative process quickly. If approved by parliament, guidance and further communications on the progress of these proposals and the subsequent application will then be issued.

The main purpose of the registration of deaths and still-births section of the Bill is to provide easements around death certification processes and requirements around forms for cremation during an emergency.

The coroner provision aims to avoid a potentially significant impact on coroners' workload, local authority run coroner services and other resources, as well as on bereaved families and to reduce delays.

The provisions contained within the Bill seek to achieve the following:

- Enable any registered medical practitioner to issue a medical certificate of cause of death without having attended the deceased, provided they are sufficiently able, from the available information, to ascertain the cause of death.
- Extend from 14 to 28 days the period which an attending medical practitioner must have seen the deceased prior to death.
- Remove the requirement for the death to be reported to the coroner when the certifying medical practitioner did not attend the deceased in cases where another medical practitioner had seen the deceased within 28 days prior to death or has seen the body after death.
- Remove the requirement for a death or still-birth informant to attend and provide details in person and the requirement for them to sign the register.

- Extend the list of qualified informants to include a funeral director (where they are acting on behalf of the family).
- Allow the electronic transfer of documents relating to the certification and registration process (e.g. transfer of the MCCD from the medical practitioner to the registrar and the form for burial or cremation (the Green form), from the registrar to the relevant authority)
- Permit cremations to proceed on the basis of one medical certificate (Cremation Form 4), without the requirement to also complete a confirmatory medical certificate (Cremation form 5).
- It should be noted that COVID-19 is not a reason on its own to refer a death to a coroner under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. The Bill ensures there is no requirement for a jury in inquests into deaths which are suspected to have been caused by Covid-19. Coroners will retain the discretion to hold a jury inquest where they consider this appropriate.

20th March 2020
Ministry of Justice