

Death and dying religious practices chart

Faith	As death approaches	When death is imminent	Immediately after death	Method of disposal	Funeral customs	Mourning practices
Buddhism	The dying person needs peace and quiet to allow for meditation. A monk or religious teacher should be invited to talk to the dying person and chant passages of scripture.	The ideal is to die in a fully conscious and calm state of mind. If a monk is not available, a fellow Buddhist may chant to encourage a peaceful state of mind.	No special requirements relating to the care of the body. Buddhists from different countries will have their own traditions regarding care of the body. If a monk or religious teacher is not present, inform the monks of the appropriate school.	Buddhists bury or cremate according to local traditions.	Usually within 3 to 7 days, a service may take place in the house prior to going to the cemetery or crematorium. Monks may be invited to remind the mourners of the impermanence of life.	There are great variations according to the country of origin – e.g. in Sri Lanka, Buddhist mourners may return to work in 3 or 4 days and place no religious restrictions on widows. Some Vietnamese Buddhists have a series of rituals; mourning may last 100 days and mourning for a husband or father may last for 3 years.
Christianity (Practices vary depending on denomination)	As death approaches, some Christians may wish for prayers and anointing with oil by a minister or priest.	Where appropriate, a priest or minister might be notified. Many Christians will wish to receive communion (which will include some form of repentance and forgiveness). Prayers of commendation may also be said.	No special requirements.	The body is either buried or cremated. Increasingly, only close family are present at the burial of the body or the ashes.	It is customary in some areas to hold a prayer service in the house for the dead person before the funeral. For Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and some Anglicans, the funeral involves a church service with a mass or communion. Sometimes the body is placed in the church the night before and in Orthodox funerals, the casket remains open throughout the service. Protestant services are simpler and the body is not usually visible.	There is usually no official mourning period or mourning dress. There may be a service of thanksgiving sometime after the funeral.
Hinduism	Hindus may receive comfort from hymns and reading from the Hindu holy books. Some people may wish to lie on the floor. The family should be present.	The family may wish to call a Hindu priest to perform holy rites. A dying Hindu should be given Ganges water and the sacred tulsi leaf in the mouth by their relatives. A person should die with the name of God being recited. Hindus often wish to die at home.	The family will usually want to wash the body themselves. If no family is available, health workers should wear disposable gloves, close the eyes and straighten the limbs. Jewellery and religious objects should not be removed.	The body is cremated as soon as possible, with the exception of children under 3 years old, who are buried.	Part of the service takes place at the home. The pandit (priest) chants from the scriptures and the chief mourner (usually the eldest son) performs the rituals. Mourners walk around the coffin, which is then closed and taken to the crematorium for further prayers.	Mourners and friends return to the deceased's house. In India, the period of mourning and austerity (10 to 16 days) culminates in rituals enabling the dead person's soul to join the ancestors. In Britain, these very important rituals occur soon after the funeral and involve gifts to priests or to charity. There may be further rituals at 1, 3 and 12 months.
Islam	Other Muslims, usually family members, join the dying person in prayer and recite verses from the Qur'an. The dying person may wish to have their face towards Mecca (south-east).	The Declaration of Faith (shahada) is said and, if possible, the dying person responds 'I bear witness that there is no God but God and Muhammad is His Messenger'.	Health workers who are not Muslim should ask permission to touch the body and then use disposable gloves. The body must be kept covered. Soon after death, there is a ritual washing of the body by Muslims of the same sex. Post-mortems are disliked.	The body is always buried.	Ideally burial is within 24 hours of death. Male family members carry the coffin either to the mosque or directly to the cemetery where the funeral prayer is said; women are not included. The body is buried in a deep grave facing Mecca. In some instances, the body is embalmed and taken back to the country of origin for burial.	Islamic law requires friends and relatives to feed mourners for three days. After this, the family should officially return to normal life though unofficial mourning may continue until the 40th day. It is ended by Quranic readings and a meal.
Judaism	A rabbi may be called to join the dying Jew in prayer and facilitate the recitation of the 'Confession on a Death Bed'.	The dying person should not be left alone. Jews present should recite psalms and when death occurs, the 'Declaration of Faith' (Shema).	Health workers should handle the body as little as possible and cover with a white sheet. The Jewish Burial Society will collect the body and perform a ritual wash before burial. Post-mortems are disliked.	Burial of the body is as soon as possible in simple coffins. Some non-orthodox Jewish communities permit cremation. Funerals do not take place on the Sabbath (Friday evening to Saturday evening) or holy days.	The service takes place in designated Jewish burial grounds. Prayers are said in a chapel and at the graveside. Although women now attend funerals, the male mourners recite the prayers and place the coffin in the grave.	After burial, there are three periods of mourning throughout which designated mourners recite prayers thrice daily and refrain from certain activities. In the first week (shiva), mourners remain at home; 30 days (shloshim) concludes the mourning period for all (though children of the deceased would mourn for a year). When mourning is concluded, the tombstone is consecrated with a ceremony at the cemetery.
Sikhism	A dying Sikh may receive comfort from reciting hymns from the Sikh holy book. A relative or any practising Sikh may do so instead.	A Sikh person should die with the name of God, Woheguru ('wonderful lord'), being recited. Some Sikhs may want to have amrit (holy water) in their mouth.	Health workers should not trim the hair or beard of the deceased. The body should be covered by plain white cloth. The 5 articles of faith (uncut hair, wooden comb, metal bracelet, cotton undergarments, steel sword) should remain on the body. Family members may wish to bathe the body themselves.	Cremation of the body as soon as possible.	Similar to Hindus but dressing the person in the 5 'k's. After a short ceremony in the home, the body is taken to the gurdwara (temple) for a service and then to the crematorium for further prayer.	Up to 10 days of reading from the scriptures attended by relatives and friends. At the conclusion, the eldest son is given a turban as a sign that he is now the head of the family.