



Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton Coroner's Service

COVID-19 PROTOCOL FOR PUBLIC ATTENDANCE AT INQUESTS

BACKGROUND

1. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic inquests have continued to be heard within the Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton jurisdiction by the Coroner using video-link and telephone to allow the public (family, witnesses, observers, the media) to participate in hearings. Coroner court hearings MUST be held in public.
2. Safeguarding measures have now been adopted to allow the public to once again physically attend the inquest rather than solely relying upon video-link and telephone as has been the practice since late March 2020.
3. In consequence of those safeguards, their objective being to mitigate the risk to the public, court staff and the Coroner from potential Covid-19 transmission, the court room will only be able to physically accommodate six members of the public.
4. Video-link will remain an alternative and available means for the public to attend the inquest.

PRIOR TO THE INQUEST

5. If you wish to attend the inquest you MUST inform the Coroner's office in advance of the inquest, preferably no later than one week before the listed hearing. Your name will then be recorded that you wish to attend the inquest. We will endeavour to ensure that you are able to attend the inquest in person.

6. There will be occasions when the number of people required to attend the hearing, or who wish to do so, exceed the number of available seats. In such an event an administrative decision will be made in consultation with the Coroner to confirm who will attend in person and who will attend by video-link.

7. Whether attendance is in person or over video-link all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that those wishing to participate in the hearing are able to do so.

8. Those who have vulnerabilities, particularly so in relation to Covid-19, may wish to attend by video-link in any event.

ATTENDANCE AT INQUEST

9. YOU MUST NOT ATTEND THE HEARING IF YOU, SOMEONE YOU RESIDE WITH, OR OTHERWISE ENJOY A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH ARE DISPLAYING ANY SYMPTOM OF COVID-19; KNOW THAT YOU HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO COVID-19; OR ARE SELF-ISOLATING. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS IN RELATION TO COVID-19 AND ARE EXPECTED TO ATTEND THE HEARING YOU MUST INFORM THE CORONER'S OFFICE IN ADVANCE OF THE HEARING BY TELEPHONE OR E-MAIL.

10. Those wishing to attend the inquest should arrive at The Castle, Winchester/Guildhall Square, Portsmouth preferably no earlier than 5 minutes before the listed time of the inquest, and will be required to remain outside the building until approached by a member of court staff.

11. If, when you arrive at the court building and the court room is full, you will not be able to enter the court building, nor will it be reasonably practicable to set up a video-link. We encourage you therefore to ensure that you have notified the Coroner's office in advance of your wish and intention to attend (see para 5).

12. Members of the public wishing to attend the hearing without any prior notice will and must be allowed to do so subject to the court room having an available seat and the person agreeing to the measures set out below.

13. Prior to entering the court room you will be encouraged to use hand sanitiser which will be provided in an automatic dispenser.

14. Those attending the hearing should bring their own face covering.

15. Those attending the inquest will be invited to participate in the NHS “Track and Trace” program and may choose to do so. A person choosing to participate will give their name and contact telephone number to court staff and will be retained for a period of 21 days from the conclusion of the proceedings. The provided details will only be shared with NHS “Track and Trace” if a confirmed case of COVID-19 is reported by someone who has attended the court. The provided details will be used for no other purpose.

16. In the court room you must maintain a distance of not less than 2 metres from others or remain in a social “bubble” consistent with the prevailing government guidance.

17. If required to give evidence you will be required to take the affirmation. You will be required to repeat the words of the affirmation which will be given to you by the Coroner. The use of the oath on a holy book will not be available.

18. When giving evidence you will remain in your seat, you will not be required to sit in the witness box. When giving evidence you must not speak with those around you, save for the Coroner or an interested person when asking questions of you as a witness, nor accept any document or object passed to you unless it is from the Coroner.

19. You may choose to remove your face covering when giving evidence. The Coroner will not require you to remove your face covering at anytime.

20. Bottles of water and tissues will be provided. You should bring with you to the inquest only those items necessary e.g. no additional bags.

21. The court room windows will be open to assist with ventilation, please ensure that you are dressed appropriately.

22. When leaving the court room please do so promptly without delay.

23. The court room will be cleaned between each attended hearing.

24. It is hoped that members of the public will comply with any administrative guidance given by court staff and the Coroner in relation to the Covid-19 measures whilst in the court building.

Christopher Wilkinson
Senior Coroner for Hampshire,
Portsmouth and Southampton