

## Red Cross to Operate Virtual Family Assistance Center to Support NYS Families Following COVID-19 Deaths

*Volunteers will provide emotional and spiritual care, referrals and support*

**BUFFALO, NY, Wednesday, April 29, 2020**— The American Red Cross is operating a virtual Family Assistance Center to provide comfort and support, information and referrals for New York State families that have lost loved ones to the COVID-19 Coronavirus. The virtual Family Assistance Center will link families to crisis counselors who will provide emotional and spiritual support, as well as information and referrals to help them navigate the challenging process they might be facing as a result of their loved one's death.

"These families are dealing with the emotional trauma of losing a loved one, while facing logistical challenges caused by this public health emergency," said Tara Hughes, Northeast Division Disaster Mental Health Advisor, who will be leading the virtual COVID-19 Family Assistance Center program. "We're proud to use the mass casualty experience of the Red Cross to join our community together and provide comfort and support to these families across New York State during these difficult times."

A team of 30 specially trained Red Cross Disaster Mental Health, Disaster Spiritual Care, and Health Services volunteers will be available to support families with their emotional and spiritual needs, as well as provide information and referrals to state and local agencies as well as other community organizations to help families meet their immediate needs. This may include challenges with moving their loved one's body through systems that may be overwhelmed and have different process than normal; legal resources for estate, custody, immigration, or other issues related to the death of their family member; information on how to obtain travel services; and more. All Family Assistance Center support will be provided virtually and is completely confidential.

Families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 can fill out an online intake form, and a Family Assistance Center volunteer will contact them:

- **English:** [www.redcross.org/NYSCOVIDFamilySupport](http://www.redcross.org/NYSCOVIDFamilySupport)
- **Spanish:** [www.redcross.org/NYSCOVIDApoyoFamiliar](http://www.redcross.org/NYSCOVIDApoyoFamiliar)

Intake forms can also be filled out by a friend who thinks someone who needs help, or an agency working on behalf of the family. Those without online capabilities may call **585-957-8187**, and a volunteer will assist them with the initial intake process. The Family Assistance Center is expected to operate for as long as families will benefit from the service.

Communities across the country count on the Red Cross for help every day – and supporting those communities is at the heart of what we do. Our work never stops, even during this coronavirus crisis, and we remain focused on delivering our lifesaving mission each day. We are [supplying blood products for patients in need of transfusions](#), including those who need surgery, cancer treatments, or trauma victims. We are coordinating with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and blood industry partners to [collect plasma from individuals who are fully recovered from COVID-19](#) to help with treatment for the most seriously ill patients. We are helping families after home fires and other disasters by making sure they have a safe place to stay and food to eat. We are offering essential courses such as resuscitation, CPR and first aid—which help medical professionals and other workers stay current on their

certifications. We are supporting military families and veterans with emergency communication messages and online workshops, and helping to aid communities worldwide through the Red Cross and Red Crescent network.

Help the Red Cross deliver its lifesaving mission nationwide during this public health emergency by donating at [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org), calling 1-800-REDCROSS or texting the word REDCROSS to 90999 to make a \$10 donation. Your gift enables the Red Cross to prepare for, respond to and help people recover from disasters big and small.