

❑ Obtaining a copy of the Death Certificate

After the autopsy, the doctor will send a form to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages showing the cause of death. Once this happens the death is officially registered. You can obtain a copy of the Death Certificate from the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages or the funeral director can obtain a copy for you.

❑ Coronial Counselling Service

The Coronial Counselling Service is based at Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services in Brisbane. Skilled counsellors are available to give support and free counselling to relatives of people whose deaths are being investigated by the coroner. Counsellors can help answer questions about the coronial process and can provide information about local support service.

❑ The Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP)

Griffith University through AISRAP undertakes research to better understand the nature of suicidal behaviour and the factors contributing to suicide. It aims to promote, conduct, and support comprehensive programs of research activities for the prevention of suicidal behaviours in Australia. Any information related to a death due to suicide is critical to our understanding of suicidal behaviour and ultimately to its prevention. This information is beneficial for promoting community awareness of suicide and reducing the stigma of suicide within the whole community.

❑ Collection of information

Any information you can share will help continue the research. It could also be used in the development of training programs for workers in the field of suicide prevention.

Members of the Queensland Police Service are assisting AISRAP to collect this information and if you agree, your authorisation will be forwarded to researchers at AISRAP who may contact you if further information is required. All personal information provided remains confidential.

CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND

GPO Box 1649 Ph: 3738 7050
Brisbane QLD 4001 Fax: 3738 7098
Email: state.coroner@justice.qld.gov.au
Website: www.courts.qld.gov.au/courts/coroners-court

POLICE INQUIRIES

A police officer should have placed his/her details on the front of this brochure. If this has not occurred please contact your local police station for assistance.

In Brisbane

Coronial Support Unit Ph: 3292 5901
Forensic and Scientific Services

CORONIAL FAMILY SERVICES

Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services
39 Kessels Road Ph: 3096 2794
Coopers Plains QLD 4107 Free call: 1800 449 171
Email: fss_counsellors@health.qld.gov.au

REGISTRY OF BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES

Level 32 Ph: 13QGOV (13 74 68)
180 Ann Street
Brisbane QLD 4001
Email: bdm-mail@justice.qld.gov.au

SUICIDE RESEARCH AND PREVENTION

Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP) Ph: 3735 3382
Website: www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-health/australian-institute-Suicide-research-prevention
Email: aisrap@griffith.edu.au

SUPPORT ASSOCIATIONS

Lifeline Ph: 131 114
Victims Counselling and Support Services Ph: 1300 139 703
Homicide Victims Support Group Ph: 1800 774 744
SIDS and KIDS QLD Ph: 1300 998 698
Survivors of Suicide
Bereavement Association Ph: 1300 767 022
Compassionate Friends QLD Ph: 1300 064 068
Salvation Army Ph: 13 72 58
Standby Support After Suicide (M): 0438 150 180
Transcultural Mental Health Service 1800 188 189/
Brisbane Ph: 3317 1234



CORONIAL INVESTIGATIONS AND THE POLICE RESPONSE



QP 0416
09/19
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INVESTIGATING POLICE

(Rank) (Name)

(Reg. No.) (Station) (Phone No.)

❑ Why are the police here?

There are certain deaths that must be investigated by the coroner. These include deaths where the cause is unknown, suspected suicides, deaths in care and unnatural or violent deaths. Police assist the coroner with the investigation.

❑ What happens now?

When the police are told about a death they will:

- determine if the person's death is a matter for the coroner to investigate.
- obtain some initial information about the death from family, friends and witnesses so that the death can be reported to the coroner. Sometimes police may need to contact the family again to obtain more detailed information for the coroner.
- arrange for the government contracted funeral director to take the deceased person to a mortuary.
- arrange for the deceased person to be formally identified.

❑ **What is the coroner's role?**

With assistance from police, the coroner will investigate the death with a view to making findings about the identity of the deceased person, when and where they died, how they died and the medical cause of death. The coroner will also consider whether to hold an inquest. The coroner will consult with the family about whether an inquest is to be held. Once the coronial investigation is complete the coroner will provide a copy of their written findings to the family.

❑ **Formal identification**

The coroner requires the deceased person to be formally identified before they can be released to the family for the funeral. Police will usually rely on a visual identification by someone who knows the person well. If this is not possible police may use other options such as fingerprint, dental or DNA identification.

❑ **Viewing the deceased person**

A viewing at the funeral service or funeral director's chapel is different to the formal identification required by police. These viewings may be arranged through your chosen funeral director.

❑ **Personal belongings**

In some cases personal property found on the deceased might need to be retained until the investigation is complete. Damaged or contaminated clothing is usually destroyed after the deceased has been admitted to the mortuary. If you have any questions or requests for the return of property or clothing you should speak with the investigating police officer.

❑ **Autopsy information**

An autopsy is a detailed medical examination of the body which is conducted by a specially trained doctor or pathologist. The autopsy is performed very soon after death – usually the next day and almost always within three working days. During the autopsy, the deceased person is treated with respect and great care is taken to preserve their dignity.

In most cases, the coroner will require an autopsy to be conducted to help find out how and why the person died. The coroner can request an external autopsy, partial internal autopsy or full internal autopsy. The coroner decides what type of autopsy is needed based on the circumstances of the case. An external autopsy involves a visual examination of the body. X-rays may be taken and samples of blood and other fluids may also be taken for testing.

An internal autopsy involves an examination of the internal organs of the body. During a full internal examination, organs from the chest, abdomen and head are removed and examined. A partial internal autopsy involves an internal examination of particular organs or parts of the body only.

Samples of blood, fluids and tissue may be taken for testing and analysis. At the completion of the autopsy examination the organs will be returned to the body. However, sometimes it may be necessary for the doctor to retain whole organs or body parts such as the brain or heart for further detailed examination and tests.

The benefit of an internal autopsy is that it can provide a detailed understanding of the cause of death including any underlying condition or disease that might be very helpful for family members to know about. It is also important to note that in some cases the medical cause of death cannot be determined without an internal autopsy. In these cases, if an internal autopsy is not performed the Cause of Death Certificate will note the cause of death as 'undetermined'.

The doctor or pathologist who did the autopsy will provide a detailed report to the coroner. If you want a copy of the autopsy report you will need to write to the coroner.

❑ **Raising concerns about an internal autopsy**

Before ordering an internal autopsy a coroner must consider any concerns raised by the family. If you have concerns about an internal autopsy being performed, you need to notify the coroner as soon as possible and express your views. You can do

this by advising the police or contacting the coroner's office.

The coroner is required to listen to your concerns but the final decision about whether an internal autopsy is needed is made by the coroner. If the coroner decides that an internal autopsy is still necessary they must give you a copy of the autopsy order. You can apply to the Supreme Court for a review of the coroner's decision. You may wish to seek legal advice about this issue.

❑ **Retaining organs and tissue after autopsy**

Small tissue samples are often kept for further testing. In some cases it is necessary to retain whole organs or body parts such as the brain or heart for further testing and analysis. These organs are retained until the pathologist has conducted the necessary tests. In some very complex cases this can take several weeks.

If organs need to be retained the family will have an opportunity to express their views. The coroner must consider any family concerns and will allow the organs to be retained only if satisfied that it is really necessary for the investigation.

Counsellors from the Coronial Counselling Service will discuss arrangements for returning organs or body parts with the family. The family may decide to delay the funeral until the testing is complete or may decide to bury or cremate the organs at a later stage.

❑ **Organising the funeral**

Once the autopsy is complete and the coroner is satisfied that it is not necessary to retain the body for further examination or tests, the coroner will sign the 'coroners order for release of body for burial' after which the body can be released to the family for the funeral. The body is usually released to the funeral director chosen by the family.

Police must use the government contracted funeral director to transport the person who has died to a mortuary for autopsy. However, there is no obligation on the family to use the government contracted funeral director.