

## ■ Obtaining a copy of the Death Certificate

After the autopsy, the pathologist will send a form to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages showing that the examination has been performed. The issue of the Cause of Death Certificate may need to await completion of the testing. 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 Family Services

Coronial Family Services are based at Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services in Brisbane. Skilled counsellors are available to give support and information to relatives of people whose deaths are being investigated by the coroner.

## ■ Research into Deaths

At times the Coroner will approve authorized organisations to undertake specific search into certain types of death such as:

SIDS related deaths  
Suicide deaths  
Domestic Violence related deaths  
Transport related deaths  
Drowning  
Work Place Deaths

The Coroner's Office or Police will make contact if required. All personal information provided remains confidential. Any information you can share will help continue the research

## CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND

GPO Box 1649  
Brisbane QLD 4001  
Fax: 3239 0176  
Email: [state.coroner@justice.qld.gov.au](mailto:state.coroner@justice.qld.gov.au)  
Website: [www.courts.qld.gov.au/129.htm](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/129.htm)  
Ph: 3239 6193  
Local call: 1300 304 605

## 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: 3274 9197

## CORONIAL FAMILY SERVICES

Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services  
39 Kessels Road  
Coopers Plains QLD 4107  
Email: [fss.counsellors@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:fss.counsellors@health.qld.gov.au)  
Ph: 3274 9200  
Free call: 1800 449 171  
Fax: 3274 9166

## REGISTRY OF BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES

PO Box 15188  
City East QLD 4002  
Email: [bdm-mail@justice.qld.gov.au](mailto:bdm-mail@justice.qld.gov.au)  
Ph: 1300 366 430

## SUICIDE RESEARCH AND PREVENTION

Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP)  
Ph: 3735 3382  
[www.griffith.edu.au/health/australian-institute-suicide-research-prevention](http://www.griffith.edu.au/health/australian-institute-suicide-research-prevention)

## 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 308 307  
Survivors of Suicide Bereavement Association  
Ph: 1300 767 022  
Compassionate Friends QLD  
Ph: 3254 2657  
Salvocare  
Ph: 1300 363 622  
Standby Brisbane  
Ph: 3250 1856 / 0438 150 180  
Transcultural Mental Health Service Brisbane  
Ph: 1800 188 189  
Ph: 3167 8333



**CORONIAL  
INVESTIGATIONS  
AND THE POLICE  
RESPONSE**



QP 0416  
02/16  
A1

## 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 a public hearing known as 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

### ■ Medical examination of the body

The medical examination may be limited to an external examination or may be an invasive examination, known as an autopsy, which is conducted by a pathologist. The examination is typically performed within a few days, but may be delayed longer if special procedures are required. During the autopsy, the deceased person is treated with respect and great care is taken to preserve their dignity.

The coroner often orders an autopsy to be conducted to help find out how and why the person died.

If so, the coroner decides whether to order an external examination, partial internal autopsy, or full internal autopsy. This depends on the circumstances of death.

An external examination involves a thorough visual inspection of the body. An autopsy also involves removal and examination of internal organs. A full internal autopsy includes all main regions of the body, while a partial internal autopsy is typically limited to a specific region, such as the chest. All these examinations are conducted by specialist pathologists and are often combined with CT scans, or taking small samples of tissue, blood or other fluids 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.

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 pathologist who performed the autopsy will provide a detailed report to the coroner. Families can request a copy of the autopsy report by writing 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 such as the brain or heart for further examination. The length of time that the organs have to be retained varies. In some cases, this is only for a short period of time. Many cases are more complex, requiring retention of organs for longer periods, to allow completion of testing and/or court proceedings. The Coroner decides when the organs may be released.

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 Family Services will discuss arrangements for managing any retained organs with family.

### ■ 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. This may take a number of days. The funeral director chosen by the family will contact the Coroner's Office and mortuary to organise the release of the deceased for the funeral.

Wherever possible all efforts will be made to respect the cultural and religious practices of the deceased.

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 for the funeral.