



**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE
OFFICE OF CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
520 First Avenue New York, NY 10016
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Official Website: <http://www.nyc.gov>

Information for Family and Friends

People who come to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner (“OCME”) to make an identification often have questions about procedures. This pamphlet has been prepared to answer some of the questions that may arise.

1. Why is a body brought to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner?

Bodies of deceased persons are brought to this office because the law requires that the Chief Medical Examiner investigate deaths of persons dying from criminal violence, by accident, by suicide, suddenly when in apparent health, when unattended by a physician, in a correctional facility, or in any suspicious or unusual manner. The medical examiner is responsible for determining the cause and manner of death.

A body also may be brought to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner if the identity of the deceased or of the next of kin is unknown. The body is retained by this office for a reasonable period of time before interment at City Cemetery or until the next of kin can be located by the Police Department and identification established and funeral arrangements made.

2. Why must the body of the deceased person be identified?

Identification is necessary in order to establish that the person reported to OCME as having died is, in fact, that person, and to complete the certificate of death.

3. What is the Identification Procedure?

The person making the identification first will be asked to give certain information about him/herself as well as about the deceased person. Once the information has been recorded, the identifying person will view a photograph of the deceased person (taken at OCME) in order to complete the identification process. As a general rule, the photograph is of the face only; occasionally, it will be of a mark such as a tattoo or scar.

4. How long is the wait to make an identification?

You will be seen by a member of the Identification staff as soon as reasonably possible. The Identification Unit operates seven days a week: Monday - Friday 9am - 4pm; Saturday, Sunday & holidays 8am - 3pm. (See last page for locations and telephone numbers.)

5. What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is a systematic examination of the body of a deceased person by a qualified pathologist. Performance of an autopsy does not interfere with having the body on view at the funeral. The body is inspected for the presence of disease or injury; specimens of the vital organs and/or body fluids may be taken for microscopic, chemical, or other tests. In some instances, an organ such as a brain or heart may be retained for further diagnostic tests. These diagnostic tests are conducted after release of the body to the next of kin. After the body is released to next of kin, a family may contact the Office of Chief Medical Examiner to request the return of any organs and/or tissue specimens.

A written record is made of the autopsy findings including the microscopic and laboratory tests, and the reports of consultants. Copies of these reports are available upon request by next of kin or other authorized individuals.

6. Why might an autopsy be performed?

Autopsies are conducted for a variety of reasons. The primary concern is to determine cause and manner of death. Did the death result from disease, injury, a combination of both, or another cause altogether? When death results from chemical agents, the autopsy permits us to obtain biological samples for testing in the laboratory, and to evaluate the effects of the chemical agents on vital organs. When death results from physical injuries, the autopsy frequently provides a means to reconstruct the fatal incident. The autopsy serves the best interests of the public, and of the family, by answering a multitude of pressing and important questions.

When the next of kin objects to an autopsy, OCME makes every effort to honor that objection. However, if we cannot fulfill our legal and public responsibility without performing an autopsy, if the family has raised a viable religious objection (*i.e.*, based on Judaism, Islam, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witness, or 7th Day Adventist) they will be provided an opportunity to hire an attorney, if they desire, and to present their objection to a Judge who will determine whether an autopsy will be performed. Objections to autopsy which are not based on religious beliefs have no standing in the law.

7. How will the body be released?

By law, the medical examiner may release a body only to a New York State licensed funeral director. Once identification is completed, you should notify your funeral director who, in turn, will arrange to transport the body to the funeral home and obtain the documents necessary for burial or cremation. In accordance with the wishes of the next of kin, arrangements can be made with the funeral home for transportation of the body for disposition out of state or out of the country.

8. How is a funeral director selected?

Usually, the next of kin discusses the selection of a funeral director with other members of the family, friends, and/or clergy. Staff of the Office of Chief Medical Examiner are prohibited from recommending a funeral director.

9. Where is the deceased's personal property held?

If you have any questions regarding personal property, you may ask a staff member when you are being interviewed. OCME has an Evidence Unit, which on occasion receives personal property.

If a person dies in the absence of family, or has no family, all personal property is taken to the precinct in which the death occurred; from there it is transmitted to the New York City Police Department ("NYPD") Property Clerk. OCME staff can provide the phone number for the precinct.

If the deceased died while in the hospital or nursing home, or death was pronounced upon arrival at a hospital, personal property is safeguarded there. OCME staff will provide you with the name and phone number of the hospital administrator to contact.

If the death is a homicide, personal property may be held by NYPD until the close of the criminal prosecution.

10. How do I obtain a copy of the death certificate?

Copies of the death certificate can be obtained from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Vital Statistics, 125 Worth Street, New York, New York 10013, 212.788.4520.

11. How can I obtain a copy of the Autopsy Report?

Completed autopsy and toxicology reports are obtained by written request to: Office of Chief Medical Examiner, Records Department, 421 East 26 Street, New York, NY 10016. A blank request letter may be obtained from the Identification Unit staff who interview you. Please include in your request the name of the deceased, Medical Examiner case number (available from the ID Unit staff or the death certificate), and date and borough of death, as well as your name and relationship to the deceased. If you want these reports sent to someone other than yourself (*eg.*, to an attorney or an insurance company), your signature on the request must be notarized.

Questions

If you have any other questions or problems, the following agencies may be able to assist you:

Safe Horizon (Victim Services Agency)

(information and assistance for victims of crime and their families) 24 hour hotline 212.577.7777

New York City Information and Counseling, Program for Sudden Infant Death

(for families whose infant died due to SIDS—Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or “Crib Death”) 212.447.2328

Visitors Assistance Bureau

(information and referral for persons living outside New York City) 212.484.1222

Bereavement and Loss Center of New York City

(a counseling service for widows and widowers) 212.879.5655

New York Red Cross

1.877.RED CROSS
(1.877.733.2767)

Telephone Numbers

New York City Police Department, Office of Public Information

646.610.6700

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Vital Statistics

212.788.4520

District Attorneys:

Bronx County	718.590.2000
Kings County	718.250.2000
New York County	212.335.9000
Queens County	718.286.6000
Richmond County	718.876.6300

Public Administrators:

Bronx County	718.293.7660
Kings County	718.643.3032
New York County	212.788.8430
Queens County	718.526.5037
Richmond County	718.876.7228

OCME Contact Info

OCME Main Office

520 First Avenue
New York, New York 10016
212.447.2030 (OCME Main Number)

OCME DNA Building

421 East 26th Street
New York, New York 10016

Borough Offices:

Manhattan (New York County)

OCME
520 First Avenue
New York, New York 10016
212.447.2713

Bronx

Jacobi Medical Center
1400 Pelham Parkway South
Bronx, New York 10461
718.829.2030

Brooklyn (Kings County)

Kings County Hospital Center
599 Winthrop Street
Brooklyn, New York 11203
718.221.0600

Queens

Queens General Hospital
160-15 82nd Drive
Jamaica, New York 11432
718.557.8700

Staten Island (Richmond County)

Seaview Hospital Center and Home
460 Brielle Avenue
Staten Island, New York 10314
718.668.0620