

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER**

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<http://ct.gov/ocme>



**Please accept our sincere condolences on the loss of your loved one.  
We recognize that the loss brings deep sorrow and is one of the most  
stressful times in life.**

***What if I need help?***

The most important thing to keep in mind is that there are resources in the community available to you and your family. The best thing that you can do for the person who has died is to take care of yourselves and then take care of the final arrangements for your loved one. There are a lot of decisions that need to be made and it is important that you rely on your circle of friends and family for support during this difficult time.

If the death involved a crime, compensation for funeral expenses may be available through the Office of Victim Services, whose contact information is included in this brochure.

***What if I have questions about the examination and/or the autopsy report?***

This brochure contains several numbers and links for support and assistance. If you have specific questions or concerns, please bring them to our attention when you feel it is appropriate to do so. The office operates 24 hours a day, every day.

You can call the office and request to speak or meet with the doctor that has performed the examination.

The Commission on Medicolegal Investigations (COMLI) holds five (5) meetings a year. The March meeting is the Annual Open Meeting with the opportunity for you to address the Commission. You can call the office for the scheduled meeting dates and times.

***What is the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner?***

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is a medicolegal office charged by Connecticut laws to investigate all human deaths in the following categories: (1) Violent deaths, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal, or accidental; (2) sudden or unexpected deaths not caused by readily recognizable disease; (3) deaths under suspicious circumstances; (4) deaths of persons whose bodies are to be cremated; (5) deaths related to disease resulting from employment; (6) deaths related to disease which might constitute a threat to public health. The Chief Medical Examiner provides accurate certification of the cause and manner of death. The Chief Medical Examiner may require autopsies in connection with deaths in the preceding categories when it appears warranted for proper investigation.

### ***Who calls the Chief Medical Examiner?***

All law enforcement officers, state's attorneys, prosecuting attorneys, other officials, physicians, funeral directors, embalmers and other persons are required to promptly notify the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of any death coming to their attention which is subject to investigation by the Chief Medical Examiner. In cases of apparent homicide, suicide, or accidental death, the scene of the event shall not be disturbed until authorized by the Chief Medical Examiner.

### ***What is an autopsy?***

An autopsy is an examination by a pathologist after death to determine the cause and manner of death. The body is inspected both externally and internally in order to document injury or disease. Specimens of vital organs (and rarely entire organs) and body fluids may be taken for toxicology tests or examination under the microscope. These tests do not delay the release of the body to the next of kin. However, the results of such testing may take several weeks to become available.

An autopsy may resolve important issues relating to the cause and/or manner of death and such issues may become important in the resolution of future legal, public health issues, and/or insurance matters.

For more information on this topic please see our website or the brochure "Frequently Asked Questions?"

### ***What needs to be done?***

Identification is necessary to provide proof that the individual reported to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, is that person. In most cases, identification is not required to be made onsite at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and can be done by viewing at the funeral home or through other methods which don't directly involve the family. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner recognizes that it is very difficult for families to come to the Office to make identification. When such a procedure is necessary, every effort is made to perform the identification in a way, which will place as little burden as possible on the family. The closest next of kin is not required to identify the body. A friend, co-worker, or more distant relative can do this task if it would contribute to the comfort of the immediate family. Visual identification at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is performed through photographic images. If the family has special concerns or requests, please discuss them with the pathologist or investigator on duty, or your funeral director may inquire on your behalf.

### ***What happens next?***

The next thing for you to do is to contact the Funeral Director of your choice. If you are not sure, you may want to ask a friend or clergy. We do suggest that you take some time to select a Funeral Director. You will need to meet with the Funeral Director and discuss the final arrangements for your loved one. There are many decisions to be made, so you may want family members, close friends, or clergy to accompany you. Once the arrangements have been decided, the Funeral Director will take care of your loved one.

### ***Do I have to pay the Medical Examiner?***

In cases of cremation, there is a \$150.00 cremation fee charged and handled through the Funeral Director. Aside from optional request for reports (see website for current fees), there are no other charges to the family for the services of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

### ***How do I get a copy of the autopsy report and death certificate?***

The funeral home may help. You will need to contact the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to obtain a copy of the autopsy report. There is a processing fee for copies of the autopsy records. The Funeral Director is required to file the death certificate with the Town Clerk in the town where the death occurred. The Funeral Director can assist you in obtaining additional copies. Copies of the death certificate **must** be obtained through the Registrar of Vital Statistics in the town where the death occurred.

### ***Who can obtain copies of these reports?***

The information placed on a death certificate is a public record by law. This includes the name of the deceased, the cause of death, and the manner of death. The findings in the autopsy report are a medical record. These are available to the next of kin and those with written permission from the next of kin. Others that may obtain a copy of the autopsy report include treating physicians, police departments and other agencies who need the report to complete an investigation into the individual's death, and lawyers who are involved in criminal or civil litigation involving the death and insurance companies.

### ***What happens to the personal property?***

The personal property of the deceased is inventoried by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and given to the Funeral Director when the body is taken to the funeral home. The Office makes an inventory of all items that are with or on the deceased. In some cases, the hospital or police will secure personal property. If a crime is involved with the individual's death, it may be necessary for the police to take possession of some or all of the personal items.

### ***What if I do not want an autopsy done (objection)?***

The OCME Statutes and COMLI define deaths that fall to OCME jurisdiction and require investigation. Next of kin may lodge an objection to autopsy for a variety of reasons (e.g., religious, cultural, and personal beliefs). The OCME will take the objection into consideration, however, the decision to autopsy is at the discretion of the OCME medical examiner.

A religious objection may be raised when the decedent observed a religion which holds opposition to autopsy as one of its tenets of faith. Major organized religions which hold this tenet include Judaism, Islam, Jehovah's Witness, Russian Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventist, and Christian Scientists; other religions, "organized" or otherwise, also may hold this tenet. Catholicism and Protestant religions (among others) do not oppose autopsy as a tenet of faith. OCME is not legally bound to accede to these objections or those that are based on personal or cultural beliefs.

To the extent possible and in discussion with the next of kin, efforts are made to comply with religion-based requests to perform special procedures or expedite examination, as long as such requests are not in violation of law and will not adversely affect our ability to perform needed duties.

It may be necessary to perform a complete autopsy despite objections. In these circumstances, when a religious objection has been raised in a case that the OCME has a clear obligation to perform an autopsy, the OCME, at the request of the family, will refrain from performing the autopsy for 48 hours.

**For statewide information about bereavement services, support groups,  
& other community services.**

**Infoline**

2-1-1 or Toll free 1-800-203-1234

<http://www.infoline.org>

**Office of Victim Services**

[www.jud.ct.gov/crimevictim/](http://www.jud.ct.gov/crimevictim/)

1-800-822-8428 Toll free

(860) 263-2760

**Office of the Child Advocate**

(800) 994-0939

**Survivors of Homicide Victims**

[www.SurvivorsofHomicide.com](http://www.SurvivorsofHomicide.com)

(860) 257-7388

**MADD-CT Chapter**

1-800-544-3690 Toll free

**SIDS chapter:**

<http://www.sids-network.org>

**Survivors of Suicide Victims**

[www.suicide.org](http://www.suicide.org)

*Crime victims and/or the surviving members of a crime victim's family have important rights in Connecticut, including the right to be treated fairly and with respect. If you feel your rights have been or are being violated, contact:*

**The Office of the Victim Advocate**

505 Hudson Street

Hartford, CT 06106

(860) 550-6632

1-888-771-3126 Toll free