

**This fact sheet explains the role of the coroner when someone dies suddenly, and how family can access further information about a coronial investigation.**

### What is the role of the coroner?

The coroner is a magistrate who is responsible for investigating 'reportable' deaths (those deaths legally required to be reported to a coroner in Queensland). Many sudden and unexpected deaths that occur in an Emergency Department are 'reportable' deaths.

The coroner needs to be informed when someone dies if:

- the cause of death is unknown
- the identity of the person is not known
- the death was violent or unnatural, such as accidents, falls or suicides
- the death was suspicious
- the death occurred in care
- the death occurred in custody or as a result of police operations
- death was the unexpected outcome of health care being provided.

After the coroner is notified about a 'reportable' death they will decide whether a coronial investigation is required.

### What is a coronial investigation?

A coronial investigation is the process undertaken by the coroner to find out:

- the identity of the person
- when, where and how they died
- the medical cause of death.

As part of the investigation the coroner may order that a post mortem examination (autopsy) be performed. An autopsy provides detailed information about the person's health and gives an understanding of the various factors which may have contributed to their death.

An autopsy is performed by a doctor, either a Pathologist or government medical officer and great care is taken to preserve the dignity of the deceased person during the procedure.

Family and cultural concerns are considered by the coroner before ordering an autopsy. If you have objections to an internal autopsy examination, you should inform the coroner as soon as possible. You can raise your concerns with the doctor at the hospital, the Police or by contacting the coroner directly.

### What is the role of the Police?

The role of the Police is to act on behalf of the coroner after a doctor notifies the coroner about a 'reportable' death.

The Police will come to the hospital to:

- Collect initial information from family or friends present at the hospital.
- Arrange a formal identification by a relative or close friend of the person who has died.
- Arrange for the deceased person's body to be transported to the nearest government mortuary. In Brisbane this is the Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services in Coopers Plains. In regional areas, it is usually the local hospital.

### When can I arrange a funeral?

You may begin making plans for a funeral at any time after your loved one has died, even if a coronial investigation is being conducted.

Once the autopsy is complete and the coroner is satisfied it is not necessary to retain the body for further examination or tests, the deceased can be released to the family for the funeral. The body is usually released to the funeral director chosen by the family to conduct the funeral.

### How can I find out the results of the coronial investigation?

In Brisbane, information about a coronial investigation is usually provided to family members by the counsellors at the Coronial Counselling Service. In most cases, a counsellor will make contact with the next of kin to offer support, counselling and information about the coronial process. This may include findings from the examination and advice of when the body can be released for burial or cremation.

Once the coronial investigation is complete, the coroner will make a written report of the findings about the cause of death and a copy will be sent to the family.

Outside Brisbane, telephone support and counselling is also available to families of people whose death is being investigated by the coroner. For more information contact the Coronial Counselling Service or local coroner:

Coronial Counselling Service

Phone: (07) 3000 9342 (South East QLD)

Free call: 1800 449 171 (outside Sth East QLD)

Email: [fss\\_counsellors@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:fss_counsellors@health.qld.gov.au)

Office of the State Coroner  
GPO Box 1649  
BRISBANE QLD 4001  
Phone: (07) 3239 6193  
1300 304 605 (Statewide)  
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)

For information about your local coroner:  
Contact the nearest courthouse or visit the website  
for a list of Magistrates Courts.  
Website: [www.courts.qld.gov.au](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au)

## How can I get a copy of the death certificate?

You can get a copy of the death certificate by applying to the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages. Your Funeral Director will usually help you to do this.

After the autopsy is completed the doctor will forward a form showing the cause of death to the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages. Once this happens the death is officially registered and a death certificate will be issued.

In some cases, the cause of death may not be able to be determined until further test results are known, sometimes many months later. In these cases, an interim death certificate is issued which is then updated once the doctor advises the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages of the cause of death.

The updated cause of death certificate can be obtained free of charge if you send the interim Death Certificate back to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

To apply for a Death Certificate:  
Registry of Births, Deaths And Marriages  
PO Box 15188  
City East QLD 4002

Phone: 1300 366 430  
Email: [bdm-mail@justice.qld.gov.au](mailto:bdm-mail@justice.qld.gov.au)  
Website: [www.justice.qld.gov.au/justice-services/births-deaths-and-marriages](http://www.justice.qld.gov.au/justice-services/births-deaths-and-marriages)

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Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.