

On behalf of the San Mateo County Coroner's Office, I'd like to extend my deepest sympathy to you. To assist you during this difficult time, I have prepared answers to some commonly asked questions.

Where is my loved one being taken?

Your loved one is being taken to the Coroner's Pathology Division located at 222 W. 39th Avenue in San Mateo.

Can I contact the Coroner's Office?

Certainly. You may contact the Coroner's Office at (650) 312-5562 from 6:00 a.m. to midnight every day and ask to speak with the on-duty deputy coroner.

Can I come see my loved one while they're at the Coroner's Office?

The Coroner's Office Pathology Division is not an ideal place for the viewing of a loved one. Visitation of a loved one should be arranged with and take place at your chosen funeral home.

What do I do now?

When you feel you are able, you should:

- Contact a funeral home of your choice and tell them what has happened.
- Talk with family and/or friends who have previously had to make funeral arrangements and can assist you through this process.

**Funeral homes are required by law to quote services and prices over the telephone. It is a good idea to contact several funeral homes to inquire about their services and costs before making your decision.*

After the funeral home selection has been made:

- Inform the funeral home that the Coroner's Office is involved in determining the cause of your loved one's death and that your loved one is located at the Coroner's Office.
- You will be asked to sign a release form which authorizes the funeral home to transport your loved one from the Coroner's Office to the funeral home that you have chosen to work with.

When can I have the funeral?

In most cases, it is safe to assume that on the fourth day after the death was reported to the Coroner's Office a funeral may take place; however, it is best to contact the Coroner's Office directly to understand the timeline for the release of your loved one. In some cases, such as cases involving victims of a homicide, the deceased would only be released after all necessary evidence has been obtained.

Why is the Coroner's Office involved?

As defined by CA Government Code 27491, the Coroner's Office investigates any non-natural death including, but not limited to, deaths involving criminal actions, accidents or injuries, operating room deaths, suspected poisonings or overdoses, occupational hazards, and suspected sudden unexplained infant deaths. The Coroner's Office also investigates any natural death in which the decedent was not seen recently by a physician, or the medical history was unknown. Additionally, any person who dies while in custody of a law enforcement agency, or has a known contagious diseases posing a public health threat will also be investigated. Decedents who are initially found unidentified must be identified and are taken under the jurisdiction of the Coroner's Office.

Is there a charge for these services?

Government Code Section 27472 authorizes the Coroner's Office to assess fees for removal and storage of the deceased. A Coroner's Office representative will communicate with the responsible person(s) to explain any Coroner's Office related charges.

**The fees will be paid through the funeral home, not directly to the Coroner's Office.*

How may I retrieve property that was recovered by the Coroner's Office?

Personal property of the deceased may be claimed at the Coroner's Office located at 50 Tower Road in San Mateo during regular business hours Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., excluding federal holidays.

- The next of kin must sign in the presence of the Coroner's Office or authorize in writing another person to receive the property. A government-issued photo identification must be presented at the time of the property release.

1. Release of Authorization for Property and Final Disposition

This document may be completed by the legal next of kin to allow another individual to act on his or her behalf. This document must be accompanied by a copy of the legal next of kin's government issued identification (such as a driver license or passport).

2. Release of Firearm

As of January 2014, any firearm including long guns must be registered. The Coroner's Office will release a registered firearm to the legal next of kin who has sought the appropriate clearance from the Department of Justice.

Why are autopsies performed?

There are a number of reasons why autopsies are performed; however, the most basic reason is to determine the medical cause of death. An autopsy may also be performed to gather necessary evidence for presentation of a case in a court of law.

Is an autopsy always performed?

Not always. The Coroner will usually NOT perform an autopsy if the deceased has a physician who knows the medical cause of death.

If the Coroner determines that an autopsy or forensic examination is required, the Coroner may retain tissues, organs(s), blood and/or body fluids as necessary or advisable to the inquiry into the case, or for the verification of his/her findings. (Ref: Ca. Government Code 27491.4)

How may I find out what caused my loved one's death?

Call the Coroner at (650) 312-5562. Usually the examination will have been completed by the late afternoon of the business day following the death. The cause of death may be known at that time; however, *cases involving blood tests or microscopic examinations may take up to four to six weeks before the cause of death is determined*

**These tests do not usually require the Coroner's Office to hold the deceased, so the family may proceed with funeral plans.*

Does the Coroner embalm?

No. However, there are unique occasions that a body must be embalmed for health reasons.

How may I receive a death certificate?

The Coroner's Office will complete the medical information on the death certificate. Your selected funeral home will complete the demographic information on the death certificate.

The certificate is filed by the funeral home with the Vital Statistics section of the County Health Department. Certified copies are available through your funeral home or directly from the Health Department by calling (650) 573-2371 (fees apply).

How can I obtain a copy of the Coroner's Report?

A written request is required to obtain a copy of the Coroner's Report.

Please visit the website: Coroner.smcgov.org and select "Request a Report" under the "General Information" tab near the top of the page.

How may I request a private autopsy?

Private autopsies can be requested for deaths which do not fall under the Coroner's Office jurisdiction. These autopsies can be completed by the Coroner's Office after the legal next of kin gives written consent, and pays in advance the customary charges for the private autopsy. (CA Government Code Section 27520)

I hope this pamphlet has been of some help to you. I, again, extend my sincerest sympathy to you during this most difficult time. I assure you that your loved one will be treated with the utmost respect and dignity while he or she is with the Coroner's Office. The purpose of the investigation of the Coroner's Office is to search for the truth. The impartial medicolegal death investigation helps to support and protect the public.

Please be assured that my office is at your service. If there are any other questions, please call (650) 312-5562.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Foucrault

Coroner, San Mateo County

50 Tower Road, San Mateo, CA 94402

Business Office: (650) 312-5562

Fax: (650) 571-6258

Website: Coroner.smcgov.org

San Mateo County Cares about providing excellent and courteous public service. We would like to know if we are succeeding and how we can do better. Please take a moment to complete the survey located online at the San Mateo County Coroner website under the "General Information" tab near the top of the page and select "San Mateo County Cares: Coroner Survey".

If you do not have access to the internet, a survey can be mailed to you at your request.

County Resources

San Mateo County Public Administrators Office (650)573-3475
225 37th Avenue, San Mateo 94403

The Public Administrator investigates and may administer the estates of persons who die with or without a will or appropriate person willing or able to act as an administrator. The Public Administrator has the same duties and functions as Private Administrators.

If you contact the Public Administrator for assistance, the Public Administrator's Office will protect the decedent's property, make appropriate disposition arrangements, conduct thorough investigations to discover all assets, and set up an individual trust. The Public Administrator's Office will also collect income due, manage real and personal property, ensure the estate is administered according to the decedent's wishes, and locate persons entitled to inherit the estate.

Heath Department of San Mateo County (650) 573-2582
Community Health Field Services (650) 573-2501

Additional Resources

HIV/AIDS Hotline (800) 367-2437
Center for Living with Dying (Bill Wilson Center) (408) 553-6950
KARA (Grief Support) (650) 321-5272
SIDS Foundation (800) 232-7437
HAND (*Helping After Neonatal Death*) (888) 908-4263
CORA (Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse) (800) 300-1080
Social Security Administration (800) 772-1213
Bereavement and Spiritual Care Services (650) 991-6439
Veterans Benefits (800) 827-1000
Suicide Prevention StarVista Crisis Hotline (650) 579-0350
Legal Aid Society (650) 558-0915
Crisis Text Line-Text "BAY" to 741741 to reach a crisis counselor

What do I do now?



SOME HELPFUL
INFORMATION FROM THE
CORONER OF SAN MATEO COUNTY
Robert J. Foucrault