

Important Contact Information

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Your County Coroner/Medical Examiner's Office
Phone Number

Your Medicolegal Investigator's Name

Your Medical Examiner or Pathologist's Name

Your Coroner's Name

Your Child's Coroner/Medical Examiner Case
Number is

To obtain a copy of the final autopsy report

- Call your Coroner/Medical Examiner's Office (at the phone number listed above).
- When you call, inform the staff of your child's name, their Coroner/Medical Examiner case number (listed above), and that you are their legal next of kin.
- Specific instructions from the staff to obtain the report may include you submitting a letter to them with this request.
- There may or may not be costs associated with this request.

Reading the autopsy report can be an overwhelming experience. Before doing so, discuss the report findings with your Medical Examiner/Coroner. When you do receive the report, it may be most helpful for you to read it with your child's pediatrician or other medical doctor known to you. They can assist you with medical terminology you may not be familiar with and explain the significance of the findings. If you still have questions, contact your Medical Examiner for further clarification.

Where to Go for Help

You are not alone.

*Information, support and
guidance are available.*

Below are some resources to help you.

Local Resources

National Resources



Compassionate Friends, Inc.

877-969-0010

www.compassionatefriends.org

Assists families worldwide toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and cause.



CJ Foundation for SIDS

888-8CJ-SIDS www.cjsids.com

A nationwide voluntary health organization dedicated to the special needs of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) through support, awareness and research.



**The Sudden Unexplained Death In
Childhood Program (SUDC)**

800-620-SUDC www.sudc.org

A centralized resource for sudden unexplained death in children older than 12 months of age. Offers support, information, advocacy and research information for sudden unexpected toddler death.



First Candle

800-221-7437 www.firstcandle.org

National non-profit health organization addressing SIDS, other infant death, still birth and miscarriage.



**National Center for
Victims of Crime**

800-FYI-CALL www.ncvc.org

Provides crime victims with information, resources, and referrals to existing victim assistance groups. Comprehensive services for crime victims.

Book List for grieving families can be found
at <http://sudc.org/booklist>

Help for Families



When An Infant Or Young Child Dies

Created By



A program of the CJ Foundation For SIDS

There is no greater loss than the death of your child.

When a baby/child dies suddenly a team of professionals investigate their death. Emergency Medical Personnel, Police Officers, Medicolegal Investigators, Medical Examiners and Coroners are just a few of the professionals who may be involved on this first day. It can be confusing to understand what is happening during this very overwhelming tragedy.

This brochure was developed to help provide you with a framework of what to expect in the days, weeks and months ahead, as well as provide you with contact information on where you can go for help.

The Medicolegal Authorities involved can be...

Medicolegal Investigator

On the day of your child's death, you may have met a Medicolegal Investigator. The Medicolegal Investigator collects information to assist the Medical Examiner/Coroner. He/she will investigate the scene where your child lived and died. He/she will interview the parents/caregiver to gain a better understanding of the child's life and the events that occurred up to the time of their death. The Medicolegal Investigator is generally not a police officer. He/she generally works in the Medical Examiner/Coroner Office.

Medical Examiner

The role of the Medical Examiner is to determine the exact cause of your child's death and why it occurred. To do this, he/she evaluates the information gathered by the Medicolegal Investigator and performs an autopsy. The Medical Examiner is a medical doctor, with a specialty in forensic pathology (he/she is especially trained to evaluate the cause of death and its relation to justice).

Coroner

The Coroner works with pathologists to investigate deaths and determine why and how they died. Coroner may be trained as a physician but does not have to be. Often they are an elected official and act as the lead administrator of their respective office. The Coroner may be a member of law enforcement in a sheriff/coroner situation.

What Happens Now...

Your child will be transported to the Medical Examiner/Coroner office for the autopsy and is cared for with respect. The autopsy is an external and internal examination of a body. Licensed physicians, specifically forensic pathologists, acting as medical examiners, will perform forensic autopsies to determine cause of death. After examination, the body is closed. Specimens of body fluids and tissues are retained for diagnostic testing.

When necessary, an organ, such as a brain or heart, may also be retained for further tests. None of these tests will prevent the body from being released to the family for funeral arrangements and the autopsy will not interfere with

funeral viewing. If organs are held for further testing and should you desire the return of those organs after testing, you should advise the office that performed the autopsy of this request. Otherwise, within a reasonable period, the specimen and organs will be handled consistent with standard practice. Once the Medical Examiner completes the autopsy, the funeral home is contacted. Your child is released to the funeral home of your choice and the process of a funeral can begin.

The Medical Examiner/Coroner's office may contact you soon after the autopsy is performed. Sometimes he/she will have specific information to share with you or request additional information. Often, the Medical Examiner/Coroner will explain that more tests need to be performed to understand why your child died. Under this circumstance, their initial cause of death on their death certificate may read "pending further investigation." This will be amended when further testing and the final report are complete. Further tests will include examining small tissue samples (collected during the autopsy) under a microscope. The health or disease of an organ can be evaluated in this way. It is important that the Medical Examiner/Pathologist do a thorough evaluation of your child to understand their death.

The full investigation will take several weeks and frequently a few months before the Medical Examiner/Coroner is ready to complete his/her assessment. At that time, a final autopsy report is completed and can be obtained (as per instructions on back).

If your child is under one year of age and the final cause of death could not be determined,

it may be classified as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). If your child is over the age of 12 months and a cause could not be determined, it may be classified as Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC). The Medical Examiner will make this determination.

Autopsy Report Conclusions

The report will list a "cause of death" as well as a "manner of death". It is the role of the Medical Examiner/Coroner to determine both. The **Cause of Death** is something that is found by autopsy; an infection, cancer or injury that is responsible for the death. In terms of describing the **Manner of Death** (or how the death occurred) the Medical Examiner/Coroner has 5 options for coding purposes: Natural, Homicide, Suicide, Accidental and Undetermined. The use of "undetermined" manner may be used when environmental and autopsy findings cannot clearly distinguish the manner of death.

Family Services/Child Protective Services

Family Services or an agency of child protective services may be involved to evaluate the safety of other children in the environment.

State Laws

Most states have laws concerning the investigation of all deaths that are sudden and unexpected. Visit your state government's website to find out about specific laws in your state and how they may pertain to your situation.