

Marriages for notification of a death for registration, but a fee applies when you request a death certificate.

Births, Deaths and Marriages will update the cause of death with the Coroner's findings, and if an *interim* death certificate is returned then a replacement death certificate, including the full cause of death, will be available at no additional cost.

## Media

When a sudden death occurs, the Media may be interested in reporting what happened. You are not obliged to talk to the Media. You have the right to request privacy for your family at this time.

## Support

Victim Support provides 24-hr practical and emotional support, personal advocacy and information to all people affected by crime and trauma throughout New Zealand.

Contact your local police station and ask for Victim Support, phone 0800 VICTIM (0800 842 846) or visit [www.victimsupport.org.nz](http://www.victimsupport.org.nz)

## Helpful contact numbers

### Victim Support

**0800 842 846**

Contact your local police station and ask for Victim Support, phone 0800 VICTIM (0800 842 846) or visit [www.victimsupport.org.nz](http://www.victimsupport.org.nz)

### New Zealand Police

Look in the government section of the white pages for contact details of your local police station or visit [www.police.govt.nz](http://www.police.govt.nz) under local police.

## CORONIAL SERVICES OF NEW ZEALAND

**Auckland** (09) 916 9419

**Christchurch** (03) 353 0444

**Dunedin** (03) 470 1147

**Hamilton** (07) 834 1756

**Hastings** (06) 870 3116

**Palmerston North** (06) 350 0083

**Rotorua** (07) 343 1021

**Wellington** (04) 910 4487

**Whangarei** (09) 430 4307

**National Office** (04) 910 4487

**Office of the Chief Coroner** (04) 918 8379



[www.justice.govt.nz/coroners](http://www.justice.govt.nz/coroners)

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# The first 48 hours

What to expect after  
a sudden death



## Sudden death

A sudden death that must be reported is a death:

- that is without known cause, suicide, unnatural or violent;
- where a doctor cannot give a certificate as to cause of death;
- that occurred during, or as a result of, a medical, surgical or dental procedure;
- that occurred while, or as a result of, a woman giving birth; and
- that occurred while the deceased was in official custody or care.

The Police will report these deaths to the Coroner.

## What will happen in the next 48 hours?

The deceased will be taken to a place of safety (i.e. hospital mortuary or funeral home) until the Coroner makes a decision if a post-mortem is required.

A Coroner's representative, who may be a police officer, may contact you to get more information about the circumstances surrounding the death.

The Coroner will decide whether to open an inquiry into the death.

## Identification

Formal identification will need to be made of the deceased so that the identity is confirmed. Medical personnel may do this if present at the time of death or if the deceased is known to them. Personal items/dental records/DNA may be used to assist in the identification if needed. A witnessed statement will need to be signed by the person doing the identification.

It is important that the identification is done as quickly as possible so next of kin can be advised of the death.

## Post-mortem

A post-mortem is sometimes called an autopsy. It is a thorough internal and external medical examination by a specialist medical practitioner, known as a pathologist, and is usually conducted at a hospital mortuary. Not all hospitals have a mortuary where a post-mortem can be conducted, so the deceased may be transported to a larger town nearby.

The concerns of the family are respected, and the deceased is treated with the utmost respect and dignity throughout the whole coronial process.

## Objecting to a Post-mortem

The immediate family has a right to object to the post-mortem EXCEPT:

- where the death is a result of conduct that constitutes a criminal offence; OR
- where any other New Zealand or international law requires a post-mortem to be carried out; OR
- if the Coroner has directed a post-mortem be performed immediately because any delay would or may limit the pathologist's ability to determine cause of death.

Any objection must be lodged with the Coroner within **24 hours** of receiving notification of the Coroner's decision. The family should advise the Coroner of the reasons for any objection by phoning the number provided by the Coroner when first advised of the decision. If you have any concerns, please contact the Police or Victim Support.

## Your cultural needs

Every effort will be made to recognise and respect the spiritual and cultural beliefs surrounding death in New Zealand, and your individual needs should be communicated clearly to the Coroner's representative as soon as possible.

## How long will it take?

Each and every death is different, and the investigation may take some time. A Coroner's representative, who may be a police officer, will be in contact with you to inform you of what will happen. If you have any queries, please contact the Coronial Services of New Zealand or the inquest officer from the Police.

## Personal belongings

Police or medical personnel may return personal items (i.e. jewellery, wallet or clothing) at the time of death. Alternatively, the Police or funeral director may return these items to the family in the following days.

Some items may need to be retained for a forensic investigation or for any on-going Police inquiry, and will be returned to the family at a later date.

## Obtaining a death certificate

Once a death is notified to Births, Deaths and Marriages, it is possible to request a death certificate. If an inquiry is to be held, this may only be an interim certificate, which states 'Subject To Coroner's Findings' in the cause or causes of death field. There is no fee payable to Births, Deaths and

