

The Medical Examiner's Office

Information for the Family

Why is a body brought to the Medical Examiner's Office?

The law says that the medical examiner must examine the body of anyone who has died in a way that is

- violent
- sudden (when the person otherwise appears to have been healthy)
- suspicious, unusual, or unnatural.

The medical examiner must try to figure out how and why the person has died.

The medical examiner also must decide if an autopsy is needed.

What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is a step-by-step examination of the body of someone who has died. A doctor looks to see if the body is diseased or injured.

The doctor may also take samples of tissue or fluids for testing. This testing is done after the exam so that the family does not have to wait for the body to be released.

The exam usually takes several hours. Nothing is done that would keep the body from being viewed at a funeral.

What if the family does not want an autopsy?

If the family does not want an autopsy, the legal next of kin (closest relative) should tell the Medical Examiner's Office. The Medical Examiner's Office will take the request seriously.

Is there a charge for the autopsy?

No.

If there is an autopsy, can organs or tissues still be donated?

Yes. The Medical Examiner's Office will work with the organ bank to help make this happen.

Can the family get a copy of the autopsy report?

Under Tennessee law, autopsy reports are public. A copy of the report will be prepared upon written request.

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How does the family arrange to have the body released?

The legal next of kin (closest relative) must give the Medical Examiner's Office the name of the funeral home to which the body will be released. The Medical Examiner's Office will then tell the funeral home when the body is ready.

When will the Medical Examiner's Office release the body?

The body is almost always released within 24 hours. Sometimes, though, more time is needed for extra testing or to confirm a person's identity.

What about personal property?

Often, the property that is on a person when he or she dies comes to the Medical Examiner's Office with the body.

What if the family has no money to pay

In Davidson County, the Metropolitan Government may be able to help. Call (615) 862-6458 for more information.

The family may also be able to donate the body for education or research. For more information, contact the Medical Examiner's Office

Where can the family get copies of the death certificate?

If the person has died in Davidson County, copies of the death certificate can be ordered from:

Vital Records
Division of the Metro Health
Department 31123rd Avenue North
Nashville TN 37203
615) 340-5612.

If the person has died in another county, it will be necessary to contact the health department in that county.

What are the hours of the Medical Examiner's Office?

The office is open to the public Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except major holidays

An investigator and a Medical Examiner are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to accept reports of death and to release the body to the funeral director after hours.

For more information, contact:

Office of the Medical Examiner
850 R.S. Gass Boulevard
Nashville 37216-2640
Phone: (615) 743-1800
Fax: (615) 743-1890