

Does the family receive a copy of the Medical Certificate of Death?

The Coroner creates an original copy of the Medical Certificate of Death and sends it to the Registrar General, Vital Statistics Division, Department of Health and Social Services for Nunavut. Only the Registrar General can create an official copy. (See address below)

What other certificates are available in order to claim death benefits?

Insurance agents will advise what is required in order to file a claim for death benefits. In most cases, the insurance company will provide a Proof of Death claim form, which should be sent to the Coroner to complete. The Coroner may not have all of the information required for this service. In some cases, for example, the Canada Pension Plan, a certificate issued by the funeral director is acceptable.

Will there be an inquest?

Some deaths lead to a “mandatory” inquest under the *Coroners Act*. These are deaths that occur while the person is in custody. A Coroner may decide to hold an inquest to establish the identity of the deceased, the date, place and cause or the manner of the death. In addition, a Coroner may hold an inquest to make public the circumstances of the death or when recommendations might be made by the inquest jury to prevent similar deaths in the future. If an inquest is to be held, the next of kin will receive official notification. There is provision for an inquest to be requested by next of kin. Consult the Coroner on how this may be done.

If there is an inquest, does the family have to attend?

No, it is not mandatory unless a member of the family is called as a witness. The family may apply for standing which allows them to participate in the inquest process, and may be represented by legal counsel or by an agent.

Inquests are open to the public and may be reported by the media.

For further information on inquests, you may contact the Office of the Chief Coroner at the following address and telephone number:

Office of the Chief Coroner
PO Box 1000, Station 590
Iqaluit, Nunavut
X0A 0H0

Phone: (867) 975-6318
Fax: (867) 975-6367
Cell: (867) 222-0063

Death Certificates may be obtained from:

Registrar General, Vital Statistics Division
Department of Health and Social Services
PO Bag 003
Rankin Inlet, Nunavut
X0C 0G0

Phone: (867) 645-8017
Fax: (867) 645-8092
Toll Free: (800) 661-0833

THE CORONER'S INVESTIGATION

AN OVERVIEW



Produced and Distributed by:

The Office of the Chief Coroner
PO Box 1000; Station 590
Iqaluit, Nunavut
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NOTE: This brochure is for general information only and must not be interpreted as a legal description of a Coroner's duties or the Coroner's Inquest. Reference should be made to the *Coroner's Act* for complete information

Who are the Coroners and how are they appointed?

Coroners in Nunavut are individuals appointed by the Minister. They receive specialized training for coroners and report to the Chief Coroner. Coroners investigate deaths that occur under certain circumstances as defined in the *Coroners Act* of Nunavut.

How does the Coroner investigate and why are the police involved?

Coroners must determine in each case the identity of the deceased and the facts as to how, when, where, and by what means death occurred. The Coroner gathers information from a number of sources, for example, from the family, neighbours, physicians, hospital records and police in order to make the five findings referred to above. Police respond to all emergency calls and often are first at the scene of a death. The *Coroners Act* requires that the police assist the Coroner to carry out the investigation, and, in non-criminal cases, they do so on behalf of the Coroner.

Why is the Coroner called when death is due to natural causes?

Coroners investigate all unnatural deaths such as those where foul play, suicide or accident are suspected. They also investigate some natural deaths, such as those occurring suddenly and unexpectedly; when negligence or malpractice are suspected or from an illness not being treated by a qualified physician; or whenever questions about a death can only be answered fairly after a full investigation. Also, Coroners must be notified of deaths in licensed long term care facilities.

Who calls the Coroner?

Any person who believes that a death has occurred under the circumstances set out in the *Coroners Act* must immediately notify a Coroner. This usually means a doctor, a nurse, or a police officer, but it can be any member of the public.

Is an autopsy required in every case?

No. Training and experience enable the Coroner to decide if the findings required can be determined without an autopsy. About thirty percent of all Coroner's investigations require a medico legal autopsy (post mortem examination).

What is an autopsy?

A medico legal autopsy is a detailed physical examination of a person's remains. It includes examination of the tissues visually and under the microscope and may include testing for drugs, chemicals or poisons (toxicology) or for infections (microbiology).

Is consent required for a medico legal autopsy?

No. But if there are objections, the Coroner will explain the need for the autopsy. The findings may have important implications for estate or insurance purposes, will often help to answer questions regarding hereditary aspects of disease, and may prevent anxiety from not knowing what actually caused the death.

Who performs the autopsy?

The Coroner directs a Pathologist to perform the autopsy. A Pathologist is a medical doctor with specialist training in examining body tissues visually and under the microscope. In Nunavut there are no doctors trained to perform autopsies, so the deceased is examined at a facility outside the Territory. In complex cases, a specially trained Forensic Pathologist at a Regional Centre may be required to conduct the autopsy.

Will an autopsy disfigure the body?

The Coroner and Pathologist are sensitive to the needs of family and friends who may wish to view the deceased at the funeral home. The examination is conducted in such a way that ordinary viewing does not reveal that an autopsy has been done.

Will an autopsy delay funeral arrangements?

In most cases, the answer is no. However, some aspects of the investigation may cause delay, such as the need for specialized tests to confirm the identity or the cause of death. Your funeral director will advise you as to timing for viewing and/or funeral services.

Are organs retained?

Sometimes, depending on the circumstances, whole organs (brain or heart most commonly) must be retained after the initial autopsy to perform further tests. When speaking with family members, Coroners will tell them if an organ must be retained and ask for family input on the eventual disposition of the organ after all testing is done. It is routine practice for the Pathologist to retain small samples of tissue for microscopic analysis, to assist in the determination of the cause of death.

Can organs be donated after death?

Some organs may be retrieved for donation after death. Consent is required for removal for donation purposes. In deaths investigated by the Coroner, next of kin may give consent for organ donations to the Coroner or Pathologist who performs the autopsy or to other medical persons.

How do family members obtain information?

Information pertaining to the death may be obtained from the Coroner as it becomes available. When the investigation is completed, on written request, the Coroner will provide to the immediate family (spouse, parent, child, brother, sister) or personal representative, a copy of the Coroner's Final Report and or a copy of the Post Mortem Examination and Toxicology Reports.