

When is a death investigated by the Medical Examiner's Office?

All human deaths of the types listed herein shall be investigated as provided by law:

- Violent deaths, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal, or accidental;
- Deaths under suspicious, unusual or unnatural circumstances;
- Deaths related to disease which might constitute a threat to public health;
- Deaths unattended by a licensed physician for a fatal or potentially-fatal illness;
- Deaths that are medically unexpected and that occur in the course of a therapeutic procedure;
- Deaths of any persons detained or occurring in custody of penal incarceration; and
- Deaths of persons whose bodies are to be cremated, transported out of the state, donated to educational entities, to include limited portions of the body, or otherwise made ultimately unavailable for pathological study.

The investigation may or may not require an autopsy to determine the cause and manner of death.

Why is it necessary to investigate the expected death of someone who died under the care of a doctor in the hospital or other health care facility?

OCME is legally obligated to investigate deaths associated with traumatic injury, regardless of the timeframe of the injury, as they may have contributed to or caused the death. Certain circumstances may require OCME to investigate a death; such as, the treating physicians do not know what caused the death, or if they suspect drugs and/or alcohol were involved.

If the cause of death is obvious, such as a traffic accident, why must the Medical Examiner investigate?

OCME is legally obligated to investigate all non-natural deaths. This includes any death related to traumatic injury.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is to protect the public health and safety of Oklahomans through the scientific investigation of deaths as defined by state statutes. This process involves scene investigation and medicolegal autopsy (including radiology, toxicology, histology, anthropology, and microbiology) complementing the activities of law enforcement agencies, district attorneys and public health officials. We accept the responsibility with integrity, diligence and compassion in order to best assist and provide answers to families, law enforcement and taxpayers of this state.

Clean-up Services

There are multiple cleaning services in the State of Oklahoma to assist with your clean up needs. This is not a service provided by or paid for by OCME.

How long will my loved one be at OCME?

Typically, exams take place within 24-48 hours of a decedent arriving at OCME. Often the decedent will be ready for release after exam. However, some factors might delay the release of a decedent, such as pursuing identification methods.

The State of Oklahoma Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME)



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<https://oklahoma.gov/ocme>



This pamphlet is designed for family members to answer frequently asked questions regarding the process and procedures of the OCME.

What is an autopsy?

A systematic examination of the decedent by a qualified pathologist. It is a medical procedure where the physician examines the external surface and/or internal organs of the deceased. The physician may take samples of the organs, tissues, and fluids for testing. There is no charge to the family for an autopsy. An autopsy often won't interfere with the viewing service at the funeral home. However, there are several levels of postmortem examination depending on the case specifics.

Is an autopsy always necessary?

An autopsy is not always required when the death is expected to be the result of natural causes with adequate and reliable medical history and there are no signs of foul play. An autopsy may not be necessary for traumatic deaths, where the traumatic injuries are severe enough that an external examination and radiography can diagnose the injuries. Autopsies are generally performed in about 35-40% of the cases investigated. Unlike autopsies that occur in a hospital, permission is not required from the next-of-kin. If the family has an objection to autopsy, for religious reason for example, the office will try to comply with these objections whenever possible.

What is the cost of the autopsy and who pays for it?

If an autopsy is performed by OCME, there is no charge to the family. In some instances, OCME may determine a full autopsy is not necessary and will complete an external examination only. If an autopsy is not performed by OCME and a family desires one, they will need to pursue private options. A private, non-OCME autopsy would be the financial responsibility of the requesting party.

Can the family view their loved one at the Medical Examiner's office?

Unfortunately, the current OCME facilities cannot accommodate viewing of loved ones. Viewing can occur at the funeral home of the family's choice.

How is the decedent transported to the Medical Examiner?

The metro areas of Oklahoma City and Tulsa contract with a transportation company. In rural areas, local funeral homes may assist in transportation. The OCME pays for this service.

How will the body be released to a funeral home?

Once the identification and examination of your loved one is complete, the deceased will be released to the funeral home of the family's choice. The funeral director obtains the documents necessary for burial, cremation, or transport out of state. OCME staff are not permitted to recommend a funeral home. The person who is legal next-of-kin (in this order: spouse, children of legal age, parents, then siblings) must authorize the funeral home to claim the decedent and personal effects.

Where may the decedent's personal property be located?

If the decedent is victim of a homicide or a suspicious death, the personal property may be retained at the request of the investigating law enforcement agency. Otherwise, personal effects are released with the decedent to the funeral home the family has chosen. If the decedent was pronounced deceased in a hospital, the personal effects may be released by the hospital directly to the family.

How do I obtain a copy of the Medical Examiner's Reports?

Each decedent examination will generate a "Report of Investigation". A "Report of Autopsy" will also be available, if an autopsy was performed. Family members will receive a complimentary copy by written request. There is a \$10.00 fee for a non-autopsy case reports and \$20.00 fee for autopsy case reports. Requests can be sent via email to the records departments. If the exam took place at the Central Office (OKC), please send requests to recordsokc@ocme.ok.gov. If the exam took place at the Eastern Office (Tulsa), please send requests recordstul@ocme.ok.gov. Reports can be provided via mail or email. Both offices are open Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

How do I obtain a copy of the Death Certificate?

OCME will determine the cause and manner of death for the death certificate, however, we do not issue the document. We upload our information into ROVER, the electronic death certificate system for Oklahoma. Initially, you might see a "pending" cause and manner of death. This means our investigation is still underway. This will be updated when the case is finalized. Your funeral home will help you obtain final copies of the death certificate from the OK State Dept. of Health Department (OSDH). You can also reach out to OSDH Vital records for more information. OKC: (405)271-4040 Tulsa: (918)594-4840

Is transplantation donation possible?

Not all deaths will qualify for donation. Typically, the death must occur in a medical facility. The decision to allow the possibility of donation lies with the legal next of kin and the OCME will not allow organ donation against known family objection. The donation of internal organs and/or tissue must be approved by the OCME, when OCME has jurisdiction over a death. OCME approval is needed to avoid losing critical evidence that may shed light on the decedent's death. Each case has different circumstances and some or all of the donation may be approved, or denied entirely. Donation is arranged by discussions between the transplant service and the OCME.

Toxicology Questions

For more information regarding toxicology, to include frequently asked questions, please visit our website: <https://www.ok.gov/ocme/>

Unidentified and Missing Persons

Positive identification of a decedent is an important step in the postmortem examination process. OCME will gather fingerprint data, dental and medical records, x-rays, and even DNA in some cases to make a positive scientific identification. If OCME is unable to identify a decedent, they will be added to the NamUs database, which can be accessed by the public. If you have information regarding an Unidentified or Missing Person, please contact us by phone or email and we will be happy to assist you. In order to help us search the OCME database, please provide the following information: missing person's full name, date of birth, date and place last seen, and other identifiers (sex/ancestry, height/weight eye/hair color, tattoos, scars, NamUs link, etc).

OCME- Unidentified Persons:
Unidentifiedpersons@ocme.ok.gov

OCME - Missing Persons:
Missingpersons@ocme.ok.gov