



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL EXAMINER

1104 NORTH MISSION ROAD, LOS ANGELES, CA 90033

(323) 343-0512: M-F, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

(323) 343-0714: 24/7

me.lacounty.gov



We offer our most sincere condolences to you and your family for the loss of your loved one. We hope this information will help assist you through your grief and answer questions about the body examination process and the role of the Medical Examiner.

Role of the Department of Medical Examiner:

The Department of Medical Examiner is an independent entity, separate from any law enforcement agency. We review deaths that occur within Los Angeles County, and are sudden, unexpected, or violent, or when the deceased has not been attended recently by a physician (California Government Code 27491). Through forensic investigation and scientific means, we offer unbiased determinations of cause and manner of death.

Identifying Your Loved One:

Visual identifications are conducted at the location of the death through comparison of an identification card by the investigator. In some cases, positive identification may require additional forensic processes like fingerprint, dental or x-ray comparison, medical implants or devices, DNA, or anthropology. We do not offer viewing services. Please contact your funeral director for viewing options at the funeral home.

Body Examination:

The deputy medical examiner performs the body examination and reviews the circumstances and medical history to determine the cause and manner of death. Small specimens (biopsies) of internal organs may be examined, and samples of body fluids may be retained and tested for drugs and other substances. Occasionally, larger portions of tissues, or even whole organs, may be retained for additional or specialized examination, if required. In some cases, an internal examination is not necessary to determine the cause and manner of death.

The information gathered during a forensic death investigation may take several weeks or longer if specialized laboratory studies are required to determine cause of death. In addition to assisting in determining cause of death, these results can be important in civil or criminal court cases. These delays should not prevent the release of the body to the legal next of kin to allow for final disposition.

Postmortem Toxicology Testing:

Postmortem toxicology testing is a multistep process, not a one-instrument test as seen in the clinical setting and can take anywhere from three to six months to complete. Postmortem samples are coagulated and require extraction steps before a sample can be used on an instrument. Each class of drugs requires the use of multiple instruments to test the sample. The more drugs found in a decedent's system, the longer the testing takes. This is the typical process for all forensic postmortem toxicology testing.

Religious Objection to an Autopsy:

Deputy medical examiners determine the need of an autopsy. Please contact the investigator right away if you feel an autopsy would be contrary to the decedent's religious beliefs, and object to an autopsy. We will work with you to try and accommodate your wishes, as long as we can fulfill our legal obligations (California Government Code 27491.3).

Decedent Property:

The legal next of kin can claim most of a decedent's personal possessions that are in our custody. Government documents, like driver's licenses and passports, must be returned to the issuing agency for disposition. To pick up decedent's property, please schedule an appointment with the Personal Property Section at (323) 343-0515. Appointments are available Monday through Thursday, from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Final Reports:

The final reports are the documents explaining why a person died. Please know the determination of the cause and manner of death can take days to several months depending on the circumstances surrounding the death. We do not automatically contact the legal next of kin to provide the results of our investigation because we recognize that you may not wish to discuss the cause of death. If you would like to discuss the results, please call us at (323) 343-0518 to schedule an appointment with a deputy medical examiner can be to discuss the determination. Please purchase a copy of the final report online at me.lacounty.gov or call our Records Section at (323) 343-0695.

Death Certificates:

We do not issue death certificates. Certified copies can be obtained from Vital Records:

- Department of Public Health (60 days from death): (213) 288-7816
- Registrar-Recorder: (800) 201-8999

Sometimes, the issuance of a final death certificate may be delayed, or “deferred,” pending further investigation, such as a review of medical records or a police report or awaiting additional forensic testing. Funeral arrangements do not need to be delayed, and the decedent can be buried or cremated after an examination, even if the cause and manner of death are pending. The funeral director can guide you with arrangements and questions about the death certificate.

Veterans:

Persons who have served in the Armed Forces, were honorably discharged, and meet other service requirements may be entitled to a veteran’s burial. For information, please contact the County of Los Angeles Military and Veteran’s Affairs Office at (213) 765-9681. For more details on veterans or Social Security benefits, please contact your funeral director.

Transportation Fees:

The County is required to assess certain fees for transportation and handling of the decedent. We may bill you for these services, unless it is a death of a veteran, a child (14 years or younger), or a homicide victim. Please provide documentation of fixed income if you are unable to cover the cost and would like to request that the fees be waived. For more information, please call (323) 343-0572.

Data Privacy and Release of Information:

In California, a decedent’s cause and manner of death, as well as the examination report, are considered public record (California Government Code 6253) and can be obtained by media outlets and the public. Public records ultimately allow for transparency in holding government and other agencies accountable and help priority setting for communities. Please know that photos and next of kin contact information are not included in the report.

County Disposition (Cremation):

If the decedent remains unidentified, the next of kin cannot be located, or is unwilling or unable to make arrangements for disposition, the County sends the body for cremation. The family or loved ones of the deceased have up to two (2) years from the cremation date to claim the ashes (or cremains). Please follow these steps:

Step 1:

The decedent’s next of kin should print and complete the County Disposition paperwork, which can be found online at me.lacounty.gov/forms. Return the forms to the Department’s Notifications Unit via mail, email (notifications@me.lacounty.gov), or fax at (323) 222-0343.

Once the ashes are delivered to the Los Angeles County Morgue (operated by the Dept. of Public Health), the Department will notify the decedent’s next of kin via mail that the cremains are ready for pick up.

Step 2:

Obtain a disposition permit. If the death occurred within Los Angeles County, or the cities of Long Beach or Pasadena, please obtain your disposition permit from the respective health department. A disposition permit can be purchased in person by appointment at the following offices:

- County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health - (213) 288-7816
- Long Beach Health Department - (562) 570-4305
- Pasadena Health Department - (626) 744-6009

Step 3:

Present the disposition permit to the County Morgue. You will need to pay the cremation fee with exact cash, check or credit card. The Los Angeles County Morgue is located at LA County General Hospital.

- LA County General Hospital, 2051 Marengo St. IPT Bldg., 1st floor, RM C1G100, Los Angeles, 90033
- Phone: (323) 409-7161

Step 4:

Once payment is received, directions to claim the cremains from the Los Angeles County Crematory/Cemetery will be provided to you. The address is 3301 East 1st Street, Los Angeles, 90063.
