

Understanding Death Certification in Wales

The death of someone close to you can be particularly distressing and the steps between death and burial or cremation can feel overwhelming. The following information provides an overview of the death registration process in Wales and guidance about what to expect when someone dies.

Step One – Before a Death can be Registered

A qualified clinician (for example a doctor, nurse or paramedic) will verify that the person has died. How this happens may depend on the person's location at the time of death. A doctor who has seen them during life (Attending Practitioner) will then refer the death to either [His Majesty's Coroner](#) for investigation, or the [Medical Examiner Service for Wales](#) for independent scrutiny.

There are several reasons why a death may need to be referred to and investigated by the Coroner, including accidents, trauma, self-harm or simply where the cause of death is unknown. Most deaths do not need to be referred to the Coroner, and even when the Coroner does need to be informed, this does not always mean there is a problem or that a post-mortem is needed.

If the death does not need to be referred to the Coroner, the doctor must draft a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death and send this, along with details of the next of kin and copies of the medical notes to the Medical Examiner Service.

Step Two – The Medical Examiner Service for Wales

The Medical Examiner Service provides independent scrutiny of all deaths that occur in Wales that are not referred directly to the Coroner for investigation. It aims to improve public safety, ensure death certificates are accurate, as well as avoid unnecessary distress for bereaved persons.

When scrutinising a death, the Medical Examiner Service will review the medical records and consider if there were problems with any of the care provided to the deceased. During this process, the Medical Examiner Service will also speak to the next of kin or family to explain the cause of death and answer any questions they may have.

Any concerns raised by the next of kin or family will be referred to the care provider or the Coroner for further investigation if required.

Step Three – Referring the Death to the Registrar

Once the Medical Examiner Service has scrutinised the death and the doctor has completed the Medical Certificate Cause of Death, the certificate will be

countersigned by the Medical Examiner and sent electronically to the Registrar in the [local authority area](#) (district) where the death occurred. The Medical Examiner Service will also share the contact details for the next of kin or family to allow the Registrar to plan for the death to be registered.

Step Four - Registering the Death

Once the Registrar has received the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, an appointment can be made to register the death. The Registrar aims to register the death within five days of receiving the Medical Certificate Cause of Death from the Medical Examiner Service.

Step Five – Planning the Funeral

Funeral planning can start before the death has been registered and families can speak to the Funeral Director to arrange to see their loved ones before burial or cremation, where it is possible to do so. Once the death has been registered, the Registrar will issue a green form which confirms that the Funeral Director can proceed with the burial or cremation.

Death Certification Timescales in Wales

Everyone in the death certification process will work together to ensure that a death can be registered at the earliest opportunity and to avoid delays wherever possible. However, matters such as access to medical records, contact with families, seasonal demands and further investigation by the Coroner may impact on timeliness.

The aim is for death certification to be completed within nine days however please note that in some circumstances this may take longer, for example where the cause of death is complex, or information has not been made available in a timely manner.

Additional Information

Regardless of the reason that someone has died, coming to terms with what has happened can be particularly difficult. People experience grief differently and some may want or need additional support during this time. Further information about help and support can be found on your local health board [website](#).

The UK Government [website](#) includes a detailed guide about the additional steps that need to be taken when someone dies, including notifying relevant government departments and dealing with the estate of the deceased.