

# AUTOPSIES



An autopsy is an examination and documentation by a pathologist, looking for evidence of a person's medical conditions to determine cause and manner of death. The pathologist looks for diseases or any injuries done to the deceased by examining organs and tissues. Samples of blood, urine, or other fluids are sent to a lab for toxicology testing. The Coroner will determine the cause and manner of death based upon all the information in hand, including the autopsy and toxicological findings.

## Terms

**Cause of death:** The disease or injury that ultimately leads to a person's death.

**Histology:** The study of microscopic structure of tissues.

**Forensic Pathology:** The subspecialty of pathology that focuses on the nature and cause of diseases and injuries and their relationship to legal issues.

**Manner of death:** The circumstances surrounding a death, such as: natural, accident, homicide, suicide, undetermined, or pending. A pending manner of death may be listed on a death certificate until the investigation is complete.

**Toxicology:** The study of drugs, chemicals, and poisons and their affect on the body. Common tests include alcohol level, over-the-counter, prescription, and illegal drugs.

## What are the Criteria for Ordering an Autopsy?

1. When a death has occurred and the circumstances of the death are suspicious, obscure, mysterious, or otherwise unexplained.
2. A child under 18 years of age has died suddenly and unexpectedly, and the circumstances of the death are unexplained.
3. Every homicide victim, no matter how obvious the cause of death may be upon external examination.
4. Death as a result of a motor vehicle accident, including hit-and-run to a pedestrian.
5. Death as a result of actual or suspected, sudden-unexplained-infant-death syndrome.
6. Death in prison, jail, or otherwise in the custody of law enforcement.
7. When condition of the body does not permit identification (skeletal remains, severely burned remains).
8. Any case where it is believed that an autopsy will materially assist in determining the true cause and/or manner of death.

Official Coroner's autopsies are provided at no cost to the family members or estate of the decedent. In the event a Coroner's autopsy is not ordered, the family or physician may request an autopsy be conducted. The physician or family of the deceased can arrange these types of autopsies through a local hospital.

In these instances, the family of the deceased assumes any and all fees incurred.