

I. PURPOSE

To establish procedures for the notification of reportable deaths to the Medical Examiner.

II. POLICY

A person's death which affects the public interest is a reportable death which must be reported to the county Medical Examiner or the state Medical Examiner by the physician in attendance or other staff member. The Medical Examiner shall determine whether the public interest requires an autopsy or other special investigation.

III. DEFINITION

Deaths which affect the public interest and are reportable to the Medical Examiner include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

1. All deaths occurring in the Emergency Department.
2. Deaths that are directly or indirectly related to homicide, suicide or accident, regardless of the place of occurrence or time lapsed between injury and death. This includes patients who have fallen, either prior to or during their hospital stay.
3. Deaths caused by thermal, chemical, electrical, or radiation injury.
4. Deaths caused by criminal abortion including self-induced, or by sexual abuse.
5. Death of a woman as a result of or following an abortion.
6. Deaths related to disease thought to be virulent or contagious which may constitute a public hazard.
7. Deaths that have occurred unexpectedly, or from unexplained causes.
8. Deaths of persons confined in prison, jail, or correctional institution.
9. Death of a person if a physician was not in attendance within thirty-six (36) hours preceding death, excluding pre-diagnosed terminal or bedfast cases for which the time period is extended to thirty (30) days, and excluding a terminally ill patient who was admitted to and had received services from a hospice program if a physician or registered nurse employed by the program was in attendance within thirty (30) days preceding death.

10. Deaths of persons whose bodies are not claimed by relatives or friends.
11. Deaths of all persons whose identity is unknown.
12. Death of a child under the age of two years where death results from an unknown cause or if the circumstances surrounding the death indicate that Sudden Infant Death Syndrome may be the cause of death. The Medical Examiner shall order an autopsy in all such cases.

A summary of the findings resulting from an autopsy of a child under the age of two years whose death occurred under the above-described circumstances shall be transmitted immediately by the physician who performed the autopsy to the county Medical Examiner.

13. Intraoperative deaths of all persons when trauma was involved or the circumstances of the death are unusual or suspicious.

IV. GENERAL PROCEDURES

A. Nursing Personnel

1. Notification of the Medical Examiner should take place without delay following the death.
2. All personal property of a patient whose death is reported to the Medical Examiner is under the sole custody and jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner. Personal property is not to be removed from the body of the deceased until the Medical Examiner has directed the disposition of the property.
3. IV lines, tubes, traction, etc., are not to be removed until the Medical Examiner gives such authorization.
4. When the family requests that hand molds be obtained, this procedure must not take place until after the Medical Examiner has given authorization.
5. The Medical Examiner may authorize an autopsy if the cause of death is unknown or there is concern for public interest. Such authorization may be granted with or without consent of the deceased's family.
6. The person reporting the death shall chart the notification to the Medical Examiner and the disposition of the body on the Death/Organ Donation Record.

B. Specific Responsibilities

1. Nursing
 - a. Initiates Death-Organ Donation Record forms and the Disposition of The Body form.
 - b. Provides general nursing responsibilities in the case of any patient death.
2. Admitting
 - a. Responsible for coordinating release of body from the hospital.

IV. ORGAN/TISSUE DONATION

Retrieval of organ/tissue donation shall not occur in cases requiring the involvement of the Medical Examiner until release of the body is authorized in writing by the Medical Examiner and documented in the patient's medical record. See UPHDM Policy #006 Organ and Tissue Donation in Case of Brain Death.