

Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner
1104 North Mission Road, Los Angeles, CA 90033
(323) 343-0512
(Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

(323) 343-0714
(24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

mec.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.

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 that explain why a person died. Please know that 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 and respect 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. A Deputy Medical Examiner can be made available via appointment to discuss the determination. Please purchase a copy of the final report online at mec.lacounty.gov or call our Records Section at (323) 343-0695.

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

- 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 the examination report can be purchased 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: Obtain a Disposition Permit. If the death occurred within Los Angeles County, please obtain your disposition permit from the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health. Death certificates can be purchased online or at their office by appointment. The cost is \$12 and can be paid with exact cash, check or credit card.

- Los Angeles County Dept. of Public Health, 313 North Figueroa St., Lobby 1, Los Angeles, 90012
- Phone: (213) 288-7816, website: publichealth.lacounty.gov/dca/dcadeath.htm

If the death occurred in the Cities of Long Beach or Pasadena, then the Disposition Permit needs to be obtained from one of the individual city's health departments. Call for more information:

- Long Beach Health Department - (562) 570-4305
- Pasadena Health Department - (626) 744-6009

Step 2: Present the Disposition Permit to the Los Angeles County Morgue. You will need to pay the \$352 cremation fee at the morgue with exact cash, check or credit card.

The morgue is located at LAC+USC Medical Center.

- LAC+USC Medical Center, 2051 Marengo St. IPT Bldg., 1st floor, RM C1G100, Los Angeles, 90033
- Phone: (323) 409-7161

Step 3: Obtain cremains. Once payment is received, you will be given directions to claim the ashes from the Los Angeles County Crematory/Cemetery. The address there is:

- Los Angeles County Crematorium Cemetery, 3301 East 1st Street, Los Angeles, 90063