***Information for Families***

On behalf of the Coroner of Berks County and his Investigators, please accept our condolences for the loss of your loved one. We offer our deepest sympathy to you and your family members at this difficult time.

Questions and Answers

What is the Coroner’s Office and why is it involved in the death?

The Coroner’s Office is directed by the Coroner, who is an Elected Official of the County of Berks. The Coroner and his Investigators are required by PA law to investigate the circumstances of certain types of deaths in order to determine the cause and manner of death. Cases which require a Coroner’s investigation are:

- Any unusual or unexplained death
- Sudden unexpected death when in good health
- Any violent death, i.e., homicide, suicide, accident.
- Death of a person not under the recent care of a doctor
- Any death under suspicious circumstances
- Any death while in prison or the custody of police, sheriff, etc.

Are Autopsies always performed in Coroner cases?

No. A Coroner’s investigation gathers the information concerning the circumstances of death, the medical history, and social history. If there is sufficient medical history and the circumstances of death are consistent with the death being due to the known medical problems, and there is no evidence of foul play, an autopsy is not usually performed. If however, there is any evidence of foul play or the circumstances of the death are unusual, an autopsy is usually performed to determine the cause and manner of death.

If there is no suspicion of foul play and there is natural disease sufficient to account for the death, the Coroner’s Office may release the body to the funeral home without an autopsy. If the family wants an autopsy in these cases, they may contact a private Pathologist for a private autopsy. Private autopsy services may be obtained through a hospital Pathology Department or other private Pathologists. There is a cost to the family for a private autopsy. There is no charge to the family for a Coroner’s autopsy. The decision to perform an autopsy rests with the Coroner’s Office. Family objections may be noted, but an autopsy may be required if it is deemed necessary by the Coroner’s Office.

Will an autopsy prevent an open-casket funeral or delay funeral services?

No. Autopsies are performed in a professional way that does not interfere with viewing your loved one. Most autopsies are performed within 1 or 2 days of the death, therefore, not interfering with the funeral services.

Where will the body of my loved one be taken?

The body will be taken to The Reading Hospital & Medical Center, S. 6th Avenue & Spruce Street, West Reading, PA 19611.
When will my loved one be released from the Coroner’s Office?

The body will be released to the funeral home, of your choice, following the preliminary investigation, including toxicology & autopsy, if needed. Autopsies are conducted by the schedule of the Pathologists. Occasionally, the body may be held longer in cases where additional investigation is required.

Is viewing or visitation allowed before my choice of funeral home?

Not routinely. Only in extreme, unusual, and rare circumstances is viewing allowed by the Coroner’s Office and on a very limited basis. Arrangements for viewing at the funeral home should be made with the funeral director of your choice.

Why are the tubes and other medical devices left in place on the body?

Proper placement of tubes is checked at autopsy. The presence of blood and other items are left on the body because it may aid in the investigation.

What do I do now?

As soon as possible, a funeral home should be selected to handle the arrangements. You are requested to call the Coroner’s Office as soon as a decision is made as to which funeral home you have chosen. When you contact the funeral director, advise them that your loved one is under the jurisdiction of the Coroner’s Office. The funeral director will contact our office and make arrangements to have your loved one picked up.

How do I obtain a copy of the Death Certificate?

Death certificates are not issued by the Coroner’s Office. We complete one third of it, consisting of the date and time of death, cause and manner of death, the identity of your loved one, and the injury section, if needed. We then turn it over, within 72 hours, to the funeral home which completes their portion. The funeral home then turns it over to the local registrar to be filed with the State. The funeral home will assist you with obtaining certified copies and the cost involved. Additional certificates can be purchased online at [www.health.state.pa.us/vitalrecords](http://www.health.state.pa.us/vitalrecords). Another source would be [http://www.archives.com/go.aspx?link=64](http://www.archives.com/go.aspx?link=64)

How long does it take for the Death Certificate to be completed?

A death certificate must be issued by the Coroner’s Office within 72 hours. If the cause and manner of death are not obvious, a pending death certificate is issued so that funeral services are not delayed. Once the investigation is complete, which may include autopsy findings, toxicology results, police and/or Coroner investigation, etc., the final death certificate will be issued. In some cases, this may take 4-8 weeks or longer.

When will the autopsy report be ready and how do I obtain a copy?

When all studies are complete, the report will be finalized and signed by the Pathologist who performed the autopsy. Copies of the autopsy report may be obtained from the Coroner’s Office after the appropriate time period and a fee is paid. There is no fee charged to the legal next-of-kin for a list of findings and summary of the cause and manner of death. Autopsy reports on cases under police investigation are not public record and are not released to anyone other than law enforcement agencies.
Berks County Funeral Homes

Theo C. Auman Funeral Homes (2) (own crematory) 610-374-4505
T. J. Baker Funeral Home 610-372-5954
Bean Funeral Homes (4) (own crematory) 610-376-1129
Blankenbiller Funeral Home 610-987-6231
Burkey & Driscoll Funeral Home 610-562-2955
Walter Christ Funeral Home 610-929-3693
Cramp Funeral Home 610-375-4337
Dengler Funeral Home 610-582-2292
John P. Feeney Funeral Home 610-372-4160
Gallman-Sonoski Funeral Homes (2) 610-373-4653
Giles & Yeckley Funeral Home (own crematory) 610-777-2331
Henninger Funeral Home (own crematory) 610-373-4500
Hetrick-Mull Funeral Home 610-589-2821
Hildenbrand Funeral Home 610-683-3526
Hill Funeral Home (owned by Lamm & Witman) 717-933-4316
Kirkhoff Funeral Home 610-4881611
Klee Funeral Home 610-777-7688
Kopicki-Bradley Funeral Home 610-372-1730
Kuhn Funeral Home 610-374-5440
Lamm & Witman Funeral Home 610-678-3461
Leibensperger Funeral Homes (2) 610-562-7823
Ludwick Funeral Homes (2) 610-683-8111
Lutz Funeral Home 610-376-7121
Milkins-Giles Funeral Home 610-921-3121
Morrell Funeral Home 610-367-2271
Ott Funeral Home 610-367-2345
Sanders Funeral Home 610-372-1624
Mae Stump Funeral Home 610-944-7621
Whelan-Schwartz Funeral Home (owned by Bean) 610-374-0962

If you wish to have your loved ones body donated to science, medicine, or research the following three listings are to be used.

Humanity Gifts Registry, 215-922-4440
International Institute for the Advancement of Medicine, 1-800-486-4426
LifeQuest Anatomical, 1-866-799-2300

The Coroner’s Office can not endorse one of the above over another.