

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q:** If I am visiting from out of town and my loved one passes away how do I coordinate to have my loved one returned home for final arrangements?
- A:** You should identify the funeral home of your choice in the location that you choose to have the final arrangements carried out. The funeral home of your choice will coordinate with a local funeral home if transportation is needed.
- Q:** If you have questions or information you would like to share with SMRMEO personnel how do I get in contact with them?
- A:** Medical Examiner personnel can be contacted 24/7 through the Law Enforcement Center in the county in which the death occurred.

Olmsted County Law Enforcement Center
507-285-8580

Dodge County Law Enforcement Center
507-635-6200

Fillmore County Law Enforcement Center
507-765-3874

Houston County Law Enforcement Center
507-725-3379

Goodhue County Law Enforcement Center
651-385-3155

Winona County Law Enforcement Center
507-452-2383

Wabasha County Law Enforcement Center
651-565-3361

Ask to be connected with a representative of the Medical Examiner's Office.

- Q:** I am interested in pursuing tissue donation; does my loved one meet the criteria for donation?

- A:** If your loved one meets the criteria for tissue donation, SMRMEO staff will contact donor referral services and they will contact next of kin to discuss tissue donation.

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507-284-3040

(Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 5:00pm)

www.mayoclinic.org/medical-examiners-office/

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What does the Southern Minnesota Regional Medical Examiner's (SMRMEO) Office do?

The SMRMEO provides investigative and forensic autopsy services for deaths that occur under our jurisdiction. All deaths that are sudden, unexpected or occur from other than natural causes must be reported to the Medical Examiner (ME). MN Statute 390.11

Our goal is to assist families, law enforcement agencies and the legal system by determining a scientifically unbiased and logical cause and manner of death. The information gathered during a forensic death investigation and subsequent autopsy can be critical in civil and criminal court cases. The information from the death investigation or autopsy, even when the death is due to natural causes, may help surviving family members protect their own health. This brochure will provide answers to guide you when a loved one dies.

What is a Medical Examiner and a Medical Examiner Investigator?

A Medical Examiner is a licensed physician, trained in the specialty of forensic pathology. Medical Examiner Investigators are highly trained individuals who perform death investigations by gathering and interpreting information about a death. The Medical Examiner and their investigators are independent entities and do not work for the County Attorney or any law enforcement agency.

The job of medical examiner personnel is to perform an unbiased, thorough, accurate and independent investigation. Investigators may ask you many questions that will help to find answers about how and why your loved one died.

What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is an examination of the body to determine the cause and manner of death and aid in the death investigation.

A complete forensic autopsy includes a review of the decedent's medical history and other pertinent information related to their death. The internal organs are examined and samples of tissues and bodily fluids are retained for additional testing. In deaths resulting from violence, other types of evidence may be collected and examined by a crime laboratory or other agency. In some cases, it may be necessary to retain whole organs for additional specialized examination. After such examinations, which may require many weeks, the tissues are destroyed like surgical specimens in a hospital. If you want to discuss disposition of these tissues, contact

our office in writing within two weeks of the autopsy. The autopsy and other tests rarely delay the release of the body to next of kin. However, final results of the autopsy report and death certificate may take many weeks. In occasional cases, specialized microscopic or laboratory studies may delay the final report longer.

Can a family refuse an autopsy?

Autopsies are done to answer medical and legal questions in the "public interest", to protect public health or to address a question of law. However, we recognize that your family beliefs may be contrary to autopsy. According to Minnesota state statute 390.11, Subd. 2b, families have the right to refuse an autopsy for religious purposes. Although you may refuse, there are certain circumstances where a "compelling state interest" will supercede the religious beliefs of your loved one.

Our office requires a written affidavit to object an autopsy. Contact the Medical Examiner's Office for more information.

Who has access to autopsy information and data the Medical Examiner collects?

Basic demographic information and the cause and manner of death are matters of public record under Minnesota law. The rest of the information is confidential and treated similarly to a medical record. This information is available only to immediate next-of-kin, legal representatives of the decedent's estate, and treating physicians. In cases of homicide, Medical Examiner information and

autopsy reports can only be provided to law enforcement agencies investigating the death and to the County Attorney until the matter has made its way through the courts.

How do I get a copy of an autopsy report?

Autopsy reports are available approximately 8-12 weeks from the time of autopsy. To obtain a final copy of an autopsy report, contact 507-284-3040, Monday through Friday, 8:00am - 5:00pm.

How do I get certified death certificates?

There are two ways to obtain certified death certificate(s):

1. Your chosen funeral home can order death certificates
2. You may go to the Vital Records area at any court house or government center in Minnesota to complete an application. The fee for the first death certificate is \$13 and each additional death certificate is \$6.

Additional information can be found at www.co.olmsted.mn.us

It may take 60-90 days for a certified death certificate to be completed. Prior to the completion of the certified death certificate, our office can provide a letter confirming a death has occurred if requested.