

# Inquests

Your Guide

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## What is an inquest?

An inquest is a fact-finding court hearing which is open to the public and press. The purpose of the inquest is to determine who has died, and to establish how, when and where they came by their death. An inquest is different from other types of court hearing because there is no prosecution or defence, and only the coroner can decide what evidence is required.

As the purpose of the inquest is only to discover the facts of the death the coroner cannot find anyone criminally responsible for the death, or liable for the death under civil law: these are matters for other courts.

### How does the inquest process work?

The person in charge of the inquest process is a coroner: a judge who investigates certain types of death. The inquest may be held with or without a jury, depending on the circumstances, but most inquests take place without one.

At the inquest the coroner will hear from witnesses and consider other evidence. Some or all of the evidence may be read in court. When witnesses give evidence in court the coroner will ask the witness questions and then Interested Persons can then ask relevant questions. The Coroner will also determine the medical cause of death.

When all of the evidence has been put before the coroner the coroner will then make findings of fact and answer the four questions, who has died, when, where and how they died and confirm details for registration

Sometimes at the end of an inquest the evidence will show that something could be done to prevent other deaths. If the coroner considers this to be the case then they will write a report bringing this to the attention of an organisation (or person) who may be able to take action. This is called a 'report to prevent future deaths' (PFD) or a 'Regulation 28 Report'.

## ATTENDANCE

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### DO YOU HAVE TO COME TO COURT YOURSELF FOR THE INQUEST?

If you have been asked to give evidence at the hearing, you will be expected to attend. If you are not giving evidence, then you do not need to attend: this is entirely your decision.

## MORE INFORMATION

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If you would like more information about any part of the inquest process, then a good place to start is the '[Guide to coroner services for bereaved people](#)' produced by the Ministry of Justice. Our website is also available at [avon-coroner.com](http://avon-coroner.com)