

# Post-mortem

Your Guide

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## What is a post-mortem?

A post-mortem is a medical examination of a body after death, in order to find out the cause of death and assist in identifying the person who has died. Usually this involves operating on the body to carry out an internal examination.

The procedure is carried out by a pathologist - a doctor who specialises in examining body organs, tissues and fluids to make a medical diagnosis.

## Why is a post-mortem being carried out?

As part of each investigation the coroner is obliged to find out the medical cause of death if possible: sometimes the only way to do this is to perform a post-mortem examination.

Toxicology (fluid samples such as blood and urine to identify drugs, alcohol or other harmful chemicals in the body) or histology (when samples are taken from organs and tested under a microscope), tests may take place as well as, a post-mortem examination.

## CAN I STOP A POST-MORTEM FROM TAKING PLACE?

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The coroner does not need consent from the family or next of kin to conduct a post-mortem, but if asked, they will explain why they consider that they need one.

## WILL I GET THE BODY AFTER THE POST-MORTEM?

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Usually, the body is released to the family/next of kin following the post-mortem examination. If the body cannot be released immediately the family/next of kin will be advised why and be provided with a likely timescale for the release.

# What happens after the post-mortem examination is complete?

After the post-mortem, the pathologist will send a short report to the coroner. This will set out if any further tests are being carried out (histology or toxicology).

Once all the tests have been completed, the pathologist will send the coroner a full report. Interested persons are entitled to see a copy of this report and you should ask the coroner's office for a copy if you want to see it.

Sometimes a final report can take weeks or months to complete because the examination is complex.

# Will any organs be retained after the post-mortem?



The pathologist may sometimes remove fluid samples, small pieces of tissue and, occasionally, whole organs from a body if this will help establish the cause of death.

The coroner does not need permission from family or next of kin for samples to be removed from the body, but if this does happen then the coroner will tell them, and will give them options so that they can decide what they want to happen when the tissue or organs are no longer needed for the coroner's investigation.



## What will the coroner do with the report?

The post-mortem report forms part of the evidence that the coroner will consider in the course of their investigation. If the post-mortem report shows a natural cause of death, the coroner may decide not to investigate further. It is the coroner who makes the final decision on the cause of death - not the pathologist.

## More Information

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)