

## Benefits of a Death Investigation

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A properly completed death certificate is usually necessary to claim insurance, receive government benefits, settle the decedent's estate, and pursue any civil or criminal legal action.

Medical benefits provided by an autopsy include a medical determination of the cause of death, recognition of unsuspected unnatural causes of death, identification of public health hazards, and sometimes the identification of an undiagnosed hereditary medical condition.

Once the Coroner determines the cause and manner of death, the State Registrar will finalize the death certificate and the funeral home can obtain death certificates for you.

### Rice County Coroner's Office

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Randolph J. Reister, M.D.  
Government Services Building  
320 Third Street Northwest  
Faribault, MN 55021  
Phone: 507.332.6100



## *Coroner's Office*



## *Information for Families*

## The Autopsy

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An autopsy is an examination of the body to determine the cause and manner of death and assess any abnormalities that may be present. A complete forensic autopsy includes a review of the decedent's medical history. Small specimens (biopsies) of internal organs are examined and samples of body fluids are retained and tested for drugs and other substances. 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 larger portions of tissues, or occasionally even whole organs, for additional or specialized examination. After such examinations, which may require many weeks, the tissues are destroyed like surgical specimens in a hospital.

The autopsy and other tests rarely delay the release of the body to next-of-kin. However, final results of the autopsy report may take many weeks. In occasional cases, specialized microscopic or laboratory studies may delay the final report longer.

## Notifications of Autopsy

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The Coroner shall attempt to make notification to the representative of the decedent within 24 hours of the discovery of the death of the intent to perform an autopsy. The family may object to the autopsy in certain situations. If no objection is received, the autopsy will proceed after 24 hours.

## When Autopsies are Performed

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Most autopsies performed under the Minnesota Coroner and Medical Examiner Statutes (Chapter 390) are ordered by the Coroner because the circumstances indicate that there is a “compelling state interest” in knowing why someone has died. Examples of “compelling state interests” to conduct an autopsy include:

- to investigate a suspicious death or suspected crime;
- to prevent or protect a public health threat and to ascertain the cause or manner of death;
- to obtain proper toxicologic or other specimens that may represent evidence of a crime or may deteriorate over time;
- when the death is an unexpected and unexplained death of a child;
- when the death is associated with police action;
- when the death is caused by apparent electrocution, fire, or explosion;
- when the death is caused by unwitnessed or suspected drowning; or
- when the body is unidentified or skeletonized.

The Coroner may determine that there are other circumstances not listed above that necessitate an autopsy.

## Religious Objections to Autopsies

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Even though the Coroner determines that an autopsy is warranted, you may feel an autopsy would be contrary to your loved one's religious beliefs. If you have objections to an autopsy, please let the Coroner know right away. You will also be required to fill out an affidavit stating your relationship to the decedent, the religious affiliation of the decedent, that the decedent had a religious objection to an autopsy and the basis for that belief, and that you will assume responsibility for the lawful disposition of the body of the deceased.

An autopsy will be performed even when there is a religious objection if one of the “compelling state interests” listed in the previous section is the reason for the autopsy. If there is another reason, a court may decide if the autopsy should proceed over the religious objection.

For more information or to complete a Certificate of Religious Belief, please visit our website: [www.co.rice.mn.us/departments/county-coroner](http://www.co.rice.mn.us/departments/county-coroner)

## Data Privacy and Release of Information

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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 similar to medical records. Information is available only to immediate next-of-kin, legal representatives and treating physicians.

In cases of homicide, Coroner information and autopsy reports can only be provided to law enforcement agencies investigating the death and to the County Attorney until the matter has been resolved or closed.