



CUYAHOGA COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

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Before Reporting a Death...

When reporting a death to the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office, callers will be speaking to a member of the Medical Examiner's Investigative Unit. Law enforcement and medical personnel will be asked a long series of questions regarding the decedent and the death scene. This information is used to determine if the decedent is legally a Medical Examiner's case, if an investigator will be dispatched, or if the body can be released to the family. The following briefly describes the kinds of questions callers will be asked and should be prepared to answer.

Deaths Reported By the Police

When reporting a death from a scene, law enforcement personnel should be prepared to provide the following facts: their name, badge number, city of jurisdiction, and a phone number where they can be reached for additional information or questions.

The name, address, birth date, social security number, race, and marital status of the decedent are also needed; however, if identity cannot be ascertained at the time, a decedent can be reported as unidentified. If identified, every effort should be made to locate and notify next of kin. Obtaining the next of kin's name and phone number at the time the death is reported is very important.

In regards to the actual scene, the officer should obtain the following information: who found the decedent, at what time, where (including specifics about the exact location and position of the body), was any evidence of foul play or trauma noted and when was the last time the decedent was known to be alive. What was the condition of the body (frozen, burned, decomposed, etc.)?

If the death is believed to be suspicious, provide details about why. Was the building broken into or were there signs of a struggle? Were there any weapons, drugs, or drug paraphernalia present? If the death is believed to be a suicide, was there a note, tape, or CD?

Try to obtain a medical history from family or from other documentation at the scene. If the information can be determined from the scene, the decedent's doctor's name, phone number, and date of last visit should be reported. One helpful place to obtain this information is from family members or from bottles of medication, if present. Look for medication at the scene and be prepared to provide information from the labels.

Note any EMS presence at the scene. If EMS has arrived at the death scene, record the squad number of the crew and the time EMS was dispatched.

Deaths Reported by the Medical Facilities/Nursing Homes

When reporting a death from a medical facility or nursing home, the medical professional should be prepared to provide the following information: Their name, title and a phone number where they can be reached for additional information.

The name, address, birth date, social security number, race, and marital status of the decedent are also needed; however, a decedent can also be reported as unidentified if identity has not be ascertained. For decedents who are identified, every effort should be made to locate and notify next of kin. The next of kin's name and phone number will need to be reported when speaking to a Medical Examiner's investigator.

If the call is being made by a medical facility, the date and time the subject arrived at the facility, how they arrived (EMS, self admit), where they came from (home, work, restaurant, etc.), as well as any diagnosis made upon arrival must be reported. If the subject was transferred from another medical facility, the name of that institution, how and when the subject arrived, the admitting diagnosis, and the reason for transfer will also need to be documented. The death date, death time, and pronouncing doctor must be reported as well as any surgeries or diagnostic testing performed during the current admission.

If diagnostic testing was done at a sending facility, that fact as well as any known findings will need to be communicated. It is important to know and report the subject's medical history including, but not limited to, past histories of trauma (accidents, gunshot wounds, stabbings, etc.) as well as all fractures within the 12 months preceding death. It is also necessary to convey any work-related conditions (such as exposure to asbestos).

It is essential that any history of drug abuse, alcohol abuse or mental health problems are told to the Medical Examiner's investigator. If the subject is mentally retarded, please note if the subject is a ward of the state. The decedent's primary or attending physician, the doctor's phone number and his/her most recent contact with the subject are necessary to report. Be prepared to provide the name of the doctor that will be signing the death certificate, if appropriate.

When reporting a fatality due to a motor vehicle accident, it will be important to share the location of the accident. This information is often obtained from the EMS "run" sheet.

Reported deaths from a nursing home should include the medical history of the subject, how long they have been at the nursing home, who found the subject, and where and how the subject was found. Nursing homes must also report next of kin information, as well as death time, date, pronouncing doctor, primary physicians and their contact information as well as the name of doctor will be signing the death certificate when applicable. Finally, nursing homes should also be prepared to provide any information regarding prior histories of trauma and fractures occurring within the 12 months preceding death.