

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Will an autopsy be performed?

A: The Medical Examiner will perform an autopsy when there is a need to establish cause of death or in cases where criminal proceedings may follow. No autopsy will be performed if the cause of death can be determined to be from natural causes.

Q: Can anyone sign a release form authorizing release of the decedent?

A: No. According to State Law, only the next-of-kin may do so. If the next-of-kin is out of town, he/she may send a telegram or fax to the Medical Examiner's Office to authorize release.

Q: Who may obtain a copy of the autopsy report?

A: According to the Texas Public Information Act, an Autopsy Report is public information and may be released to anyone who requests a copy.

Q: How can I find out about the cause of death?

A: You may contact the Medical Examiner's Office at 512.854.9599.

Q: When will a death certificate be issued?

A: The Medical Examiner's Office will work with the designated funeral home to complete a "pending" death certificate within 10 working days. A final death certificate may take six to eight weeks if the death is being investigated.

Q: Where can I obtain a copy of the death certificate?

A: Death certificates may be obtained from the Bureau of Vital Statistics, the Justice of the Peace, or the funeral home.

Q: Are viewings allowed at the Medical Examiner's Office?

A: No. The facility is not designed to accommodate viewings. You should contact the funeral home to schedule a time to view your family member or friend.

Who can help?

The Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit can assist you with information regarding your case status, Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to the appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



Resources

The Christi Center

512.467.2600

www.christicenter.org

Austin Center for Grief and Loss

512.472.7878

www.austingrief.org

Hospice Austin

512.342.4700

www.hospiceaustin.org

Travis County Medical

Examiner's Office

512.854.9599

www.traviscountytexas.gov/medical_examiner

Death Investigation

Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd
Austin, TX 78751
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:
PO Box 1748
Austin, TX 78767

If you have just lost a loved one and the death is being investigated by the Travis County Sheriff's Office, rest assured the loss of your loved one will be investigated to determine what happened.

Victim Services will likely be contacted in an effort to ensure that you have the support and resources you need during such a difficult time.

Expected Deaths

If the death was expected, a detective will most likely not respond to the scene. The case will be reviewed and you will be contacted if he/she has any questions regarding the loss of your loved one.

Unexpected Deaths

If the death was unexpected, a detective will most likely respond to the scene to investigate, even if the death appears to be from suicide.

The scene will be treated as a crime scene to protect the integrity of any evidence that might have been left behind.

During the investigation, the detective will likely speak with the person/s who discovered the deceased, in addition to any close friends or family members to learn more about the person who has passed away.

Once the initial investigation is complete, the detective will continue investigating the death and will be in touch with you to keep you updated on any progress.

Child Deaths

If the case involves the death of a child, it is important to know that an investigation will be completed by Child Protective Services.

Medical Examiner's Office

The Travis County Medical Examiner's Office is responsible for investigation and certification of the cause/manner of death of all sudden, unexpected, violent, suspicious, or unnatural deaths that occur in Travis County. If the Medical Examiner will be involved in the death of your loved one, necessary information about their office and process can be provided by Victim Services or you can also call the Medical Examiner's Office at **(512) 854-9599**.

What do I need to do right away?

Get Support...If you have not already done so, contact a support person to be with you. It's crucial to utilize the emotional and physical assistance of family members, trusted friends, and/or clergy at this painful time.

Select a funeral home...If the death of your loved one has been determined to be a natural death and the death certificate will be signed by a physician, your loved one can be transported to the selected funeral home.

If the Medical Examiner's Office is investigating the death of your loved one, he/she will be transported to the Medical Examiner's Office. The Funeral Director at the selected funeral home should be notified to contact the Medical Examiner's Office at **(512) 854-9599** to discuss the process and time frame for final arrangements.

Victim Services can provide a list of local funeral homes to aid in the process of final arrangements.

Consider organ and/or tissue donation...If your loved one is an organ and/or tissue donor (or if this is something you or a lawful representative would consider), contact Donate Life Texas (1.800.633.6562), Texas Organ Sharing Alliance (1.866.685.0277) or the Tissue Center of Central Texas (1.800.489.8027).

Notify Relatives and Friends...placing multiple calls and delivering the news of a death can be an overwhelming task. Victim Services can help with this upon your request.

What About the Media?

Travis County Sheriff's Office has no control over what the media reports. The department takes no position on whether or not you should contact or communicate with media representatives—this is entirely your decision.

What About My Loved Ones Belongings?

Every effort will be made to promptly return the personal effects of your loved one, provided these items are not considered evidence.

All evidence, will be impounded by the Travis County's Sheriff's Office. Once a non-criminal investigation is completed, all impounded items may be returned or, if you prefer, destroyed. Victim Services can provide you with the details regarding the condition of property that is available for release and the process for the return or destruction of this property.

In criminal investigations, impounded items will only be released when a determination is made that they no longer hold evidentiary value. This determination is typically made by the prosecuting agency and can be months, even years after the death.

What About Cleaning?

Scene cleanup is the responsibility of the property owner. These costs may be covered by insurance and it is important to keep in mind that such cleanup may require a specialized cleaning service. Victim Services can provide a list of local companies that may be able to assist with this process.