

We, at the Lexington County Coroner's Office, extend our deepest sympathy to you during this difficult time. We hope that this information will assist you by providing answers to commonly asked questions.

Q. WHY IS THE CORONER INVOLVED?

A. State law requires the Coroner to inquire into and determine the circumstances, manner, and cause of all sudden, violent, or unusual deaths and those deaths where the decedent has passed within 24 hours of admission to the hospital. The deceased may be taken to the Coroner's morgue facility and examined by a pathologist to determine the cause of death. A death certificate is issued after the examination is completed. Occasionally, more extensive testing is required, in which case an interim or "pending" death certificate is issued, which will allow the family to make funeral arrangements. An amendment will be issued to accompany the death certificate following completion of special testing.

Q. WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

A. Select a funeral home and inform the funeral director that the death is being handled by the Coroner. Ask them to please notify us that they will be handling the arrangements. Our office does not select funeral homes nor do we make arrangements. In the event someone is making the arrangements for the family, the Coroner must be provided written authorization to release the deceased, signed by the legal next of kin. Should he/she reside at a distant location, they may send a FAX directly to the Coroner's Office. The following format should be used:

**CORONER, LEXINGTON COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA
RELEASE THE REMAINS OF MY (relationship and name of decedent, Coroner case #)
TO (name of funeral director selected).
SIGNED (name) _____
RELATIONSHIP _____
PHONE NUMBER _____**

Q. WILL AN AUTOPSY BE PERFORMED?

A. The Coroner's Office will determine what level of examination is warranted on any given case in order to determine the cause and manner of death. Permission from the family is not required. Not all cases will require an autopsy. Contact us for further information on the status of your loved one's case.

Q. WHERE WILL MY RELATIVE/FRIEND BE TAKEN?

A. He/She will be taken to the Coroner's main morgue facility located at:

Lexington Medical Center
2720 Sunset Boulevard
West Columbia SC 29169

Q. IS IT NECESSARY FOR ME TO COME TO THE CORONER'S OFFICE TO IDENTIFY THE BODY?

A. No. In a majority of cases, visual identification is not required. Should it become necessary for you to come in or bring records or x-rays, you will be contacted.

Q. IS VIEWING ALLOWED?

A. No. The Coroner's morgue facility is not designed to accommodate viewing. Arrangements can be made at the selected funeral home for viewing.

Q. ARE TISSUES, ORGANS, BLOOD AND/OR BODY FLUIDS RETAINED AFTER THE AUTOPSY AND RELEASE OF THE BODY?

A. If it is determined that an autopsy, external examination or toxicology analysis is required to determine or confirm the cause and manner of death pursuant to South Carolina Code of Laws Section 17-5-520, tissue(s), organ(s), body fluid(s) may be retained for analysis and/or evidentiary purposes pursuant to South Carolina Code of Laws Section 17-5-530.

Q. WILL AN AUTOPSY REPORT BE AVAILABLE TO ME?

A. Yes. The decedent's next of kin may obtain a copy of the autopsy report and/or toxicology report by submitting a written request to the Coroner's Office, 117 Duffie Drive, Lexington, SC, 29072. Requests may also be faxed (803-785-8492) or emailed (coroner@lex-co.com). In many cases, extensive testing of organs, tissues, blood, etc. must be performed in order to determine the cause and/or manner of death. Although we strive to ensure that death certificates are obtained in a timely manner, these tests may take from ten to 16 weeks to be finalized, and a final death certificate cannot be issued until the final autopsy report is issued by the pathologist.

Q. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE BEFORE MY RELATIVE/FRIEND IS RELEASED FROM YOUR OFFICE?

A. Generally, it should not take more than two days. The legal next of kin or funeral director will coordinate the release.

Q. WILL I BE CHARGED FOR CORONER SERVICES?

A. No. There are **no fees** to the family of the deceased for Coroner services.

Q. I NEED TO ENTER MY RELATIVE/FRIEND'S RESIDENCE, BUT IT IS SEALED. WHAT CAN I DO?

A. In order to enter, you need to obtain permission from the agency listed on the seal. If it is a Coroner's seal, call (803) 359-8439.

Q. HOW AND WHEN CAN PERSONAL POSSESSIONS BE CLAIMED?

A. Any personal possessions in the custody of the Coroner's Office may be claimed by the legal next of kin. Governmental documents (driver's license, passport, military identification card) will not be released to the next of kin. These documents will be returned to the issuing agency for disposition. To avoid any inconvenience to you, call the Coroner's Office at (803) 359-8439 before coming into the office. The Coroner's Office will advise you if any documents will be needed and of any other requirements. The Personal Property Section is open from 8:30 AM until 4:30 PM Monday through Friday and is closed weekends and holidays. Sometimes, personal possessions are taken into custody by other law enforcement agencies. You will need to contact those agencies to recover personal possessions in their custody. Clothing is not usually considered property. Unless there is a need to hold clothing as evidence, it is released to the mortuary recovering the deceased. Clothing that presents a health and/or safety hazard may be disposed of for the safety of all persons involved.

Q. IF THERE ARE NO FUNDS FOR BURIAL, WHAT CAN I DO?

A. If the deceased or the legal next of kin do not have sufficient funds for burial, the alternative may be County disposition. In these circumstances, proof of indigence is required. The legal next of kin should contact the Coroner's Office at (803) 359-8439 for additional information. If County disposition is authorized, there may be a substantial delay in receiving a death certificate and, as a consequence, certain benefits.

Q. MY RELATIVE/FRIEND WAS IN THE MILITARY. WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR INFORMATION?

A. Persons who have served in the Armed Forces, were honorably discharged, and meet other service requirements may be entitled to a Veteran's burial. For information, contact the Lexington County Veteran's Affairs Office at (803) 785-8400 or (803) 332-8400. For more information on Veterans or Social Security benefits, contact your funeral director.

Q. WHERE CAN I OBTAIN A DEATH CERTIFICATE?

A. Death certificates are filed with the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) Vital Records by the funeral home. Should you require certified copies, they can be ordered through the funeral home or purchased from:

- 1) SC DHEC Vital Records County Office
1070-B South Lake Drive
Lexington SC 29072
Phone: (803) 785-6550
- 2) SC DHEC Vital Records State Office
2600 Bull Street
Columbia SC 29201-1797
Phone: (803) 898-3630

Q. WHAT ABOUT TISSUE/ORGAN DONATION?

- A.** We support the donation of organs and tissues in conjunction with LifePoint. We will refer potential donors to LifePoint as required by state law, Section 44-43-960. LifePoint will contact the next of kin to complete a medical/social history of the potential donor. With the ***next of kin's consent***, many types of tissues and organs may be donated. To learn more about tissue and organ donations, visit LifePoint on the web at www.lifepoint-sc.org.

We hope the advice and counseling provided by your funeral director and this information will help you during this time of loss. However, should you need additional assistance, please telephone our office at (803) 359-8439.

The mission of the Lexington County Coroner's Office is to serve the citizens of Lexington County with professionalism and integrity while upholding our commitment to determine the cause and manner of death in a dignified manner while maintaining respect for the families.