

How do I obtain records?

The investigating coroner should provide you with the following verbal information:

- Contact within 24 hours of a death to discuss circumstances and next steps.
- The **initial** results from the autopsy when completed.
- The **final** results from the autopsy when a report is completed.

For written records and results:

Autopsy Report

- This may take up to **3 months** or more to be completed. You can request a copy of the autopsy report if you are the nearest relative via the **Minister of Justice and Public Safety**.

Death Certificate

- A finalized **Registration of Death** can be obtained by the department of **Vital Statistics**
- **Proof of death** can be provided by **funeral homes** to allow the nearest relative to legally act on behalf of the deceased.

Coroners Report

- A **Final Coroners Report** can also be obtained from the **Minister of Justice and Public Safety** by the nearest relative if needed.

Insurance / other Paperwork:

If you require help with paperwork surrounding the death of your loved one (insurance forms, attending physician statements, etc.), please reach out to the **Office of the Chief Coroner**

Contacts

Office of the Chief Coroner:

sewight@gov.pe.ca
(902) 894-0385
(902) 368-6362 (fax)

Office of the Minister of Justice and Public Safety:

Immunn@gov.pe.ca
(902) 368-5152
(902) 368-4910 (fax)

Police Officer associated with your case:

Coroner associated with your case:

For help with grief:

CMH contact

PrinceEdwardIsland.ca/en/information/health-pe/mental-health-and-addictions-open-access-counselling

Grief Support Groups

(902) 330-3857 or griefsupport@hospicepei.ca

Victim Services

Queens and Kings County
Charlottetown, PE
Telephone: (902) 368-4582
victimservicescharlottetown@gov.pe.ca

Prince County
Summerside, PE
(902) 888-8218
victimservicessummerside@gov.pe.ca



DEATH INVESTIGATIONS IN PEI

A Guide For Families



The Sudden and Unexpected death of a family member or loved one presents one of life's most difficult challenges. During this grief and loss period, it is common to have questions regarding next steps. This guide aims to help explain the role of a coroner, next steps, and how to navigate what is to come.

The Office of the Chief Coroner and those who work within the death investigation process respect a diverse range of cultural, religious, and philosophical views. Our aim is to provide thorough and timely death investigations in a respectful and compassionate manner.

This pamphlet is meant as a brief overview and general guide. For legal description of Coroners' duties, investigations, and inquests, the *Coroners Act* will provide full details. For specific inquiries, please see the contact information on the back on this brochure.

Who are Coroners?

Coroners on Prince Edward Island are medical doctors who respond to unexpected, unnatural, or unexplained deaths. They have been appointed under the *Coroners Act* by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to investigate sudden deaths.

Coroners are typically involved by a **Police Officer** to conduct a **Death investigation** when a death has occurred **suddenly or unexpectedly**.

It is important to know that Coroners work Independently from Police during death investigations.

What is a Death Investigation?

A death investigation is a process whereby a coroner or forensic pathologist seeks to understand how and why a person died. A coroner in Prince Edward Island must answer five questions when investigating a death:

- Who (identity of the deceased)
- When (date of death)
- Where (location of death)
- How (medical cause of death)
- By what means (natural causes, accident, homicide, suicide or undetermined)

Information may be obtained from several sources including, but not limited to family, co-workers, neighbours, doctors, hospital records, police and other emergency service workers.

What is a reportable death and why is a Coroner called?

Under the Coroners Act, certain types of deaths must be reported to a coroner. These reportable deaths include, but are not limited to:

- deaths that occur suddenly and unexpectedly
- deaths at a workplace or during the course of employment
- deaths while in police custody, while a person is incarcerated in a correctional facility, or held involuntarily under the Mental Health Act
- deaths that appear to be the result of an accident, suicide or homicide

Who can contact a coroner to report a death?

While deaths are generally reported to the coroner by health care workers or the police, anyone, including a family member, should immediately contact the police and a coroner when a reportable death occurs.

What To Expect

When a Coroner is contacted to conduct a death investigation **information gathering** starts immediately. The Coroner may:

- Attend the scene to assess what has occurred
- Speak with Police Officers and Family Members over the phone
- Determine if an autopsy is needed

The Coroner will work with Police and to determine who is the **Next of Kin**. Legally, the **Next of Kin** is the individual who will need to liaise with the Coroner and Police.

What is an Autopsy?

An autopsy, also known as a postmortem examination, is a process whereby a pathologist or forensic pathologist examines the decedent's body to help determine cause of death. An autopsy usually includes the examination of internal organs.

Who decides if an autopsy is needed?

In Prince Edward Island, it is the Coroner who decides if an autopsy is necessary as part of a death investigation. It is important that if you feel strongly about an autopsy that you discuss with the investigating Coroner to share in the decision making process for your loved one.

The coroner will explain the need for an autopsy and carefully assess concerns expressed by the family. However, the coroner will proceed with ordering an autopsy if he or she believes an autopsy is needed to inform the death investigation. The coroner's decision is legal and binding.

Who performs the autopsy?

A pathologist or forensic pathologist performs the autopsy.

Who will be involved in the Death Investigation?

When a death occurs suddenly or unexpectedly, families can expect that Police, the Coroner, a transport Service, and a Funeral Home will be involved in the care of a loved one.

What to Expect?

If an **autopsy is performed** or deemed necessary, the Coroner will communicate this with the family.

- The Coroner Transport Service will bring your loved one to the Morgue at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, or the Nova Scotia Medical Examiner Service in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia if a specialized forensic autopsy is needed.
- The autopsy will occur and the coroner is provided the results on completion. The Coroner will be in contact after the autopsy to discuss the findings.
- Once the autopsy is completed, the body of your loved one is released to a funeral home and transported to that location for final arrangements.

If an **autopsy is NOT performed** or deemed unnecessary, the Coroner will communicate this with the family.

- The body of your loved one can be released directly from the location of death to the funeral home of your choosing.
- If funeral plans have not been previously made, the coroner can arrange transport and safe keeping at a hospital morgue until arrangements are decided upon.

Autopsies are **usually** completed within 1-3 days: there are exceptions and occasional delays on weekends and holidays. The coroner should provide you with an **estimated** timeline for completion of the autopsy.