



The mission of the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory is to provide the highest quality scientific services to the criminal justice community and the State of Arkansas

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ASCL Medical Examiner Services Brochure

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When a loved one dies suddenly or unexpectedly, by unnatural or violent means, family members are left bereaved, sometimes confused, and perhaps angry. One way to help the family understand what happened to their loved one is by performing a medicolegal postmortem examination.

Arkansas Code § 12-12-315 states that whenever someone dies in these circumstances, that the county coroner, police, sheriff, state police, warden, or prosecutor may request an examination by the Medical Examiner's Section to determine the cause and manner of death. Permission from the next of kin is not required in these circumstances.

We know that you will have questions about the procedures in the Medical Examiner's Office at the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory and have prepared this pamphlet to help families better understand what can seem like a very complicated process.



The Arkansas State Medical Examiner's Office is committed to providing the highest quality medicolegal services to the state and families of Arkansas

The Medical Examiner's Office at the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory is authorized to transport the deceased person from the county of origin (i.e., where the incident occurred) or where the deceased is being held after the pronouncement of death (e.g., a hospital or funeral home).

The bodies of such deceased persons shall be returned to the county from which they were brought at the expense of the Crime Laboratory only if the Medical Examiner determines death was a homicide, unexplained sudden pediatric death, suspected drug death, or a jail custody death. For all other deaths, the expense of transporting and returning the bodies shall be borne by whomever requested the examination (A.C.A. § 12-12-316).

When an examination has been performed by the Crime Laboratory, a certificate of death is issued with the deceased when they are released to the funeral home, unless the death was pronounced out of state. A death certificate serves to certify that a death has occurred. Even if it does not initially have a specific cause or manner of death listed (e.g., "Pending"), it is still considered an official document and is registered at the County Health Department and sent to the State Health Department, Bureau of Vital Records. Copies of the death certificate can be obtained by families either from the funeral home or by contacting the Bureau of Vital Records directly at (501) 661-2336.

If the death certificate has been opined "Pending", the Medical Examiner will issue a supplemental death certificate when they have made a final opinion as to the cause and/or manner of death, which is then mailed to the State Bureau of Vital Records in Little Rock. This may take weeks or, in some instances, months because of the complexity of the case, as well as any necessary ancillary studies and investigation.

Once the postmortem examination has been completed, the Medical Examiner will release the body to the funeral home chosen by the next-of-kin. The Medical Examiner's Section requires written authorization from the funeral home before the body can be released (ME-FORM-56).

The family is encouraged to call our office to check on the status of reports and death certificates, but please allow the Medical Examiner a minimum of three months for the completion of the final examination autopsy report. This allows sufficient time for all ancillary testing and investigation to be completed.

A postmortem examination report is prepared for every case submitted to the Crime Laboratory. This report contains the investigative and medical findings of the case. An "opinion" is included to explain the findings and the reason(s) for the determination of the cause and manner of death.

This report is released to the coroner, investigating agency, and the prosecutor in all cases. The next-of-kin can request a copy of the report by contacting the Medical Examiner's Office. Insurance companies and attorneys in civil proceedings can request a copy of the report from the Medical Examiner's Office for a fee of \$50.00.

However, cases opined either "homicide" or "undetermined" require an additional authorization, either from the prosecuting attorney in the county where the incident occurred or via a court order from a court of competent jurisdiction.

Our reports are privileged and confidential as described in A.C.A. § 12-12-312.

We hope this pamphlet has been helpful in answering your questions and concerns. Please feel free to call our office Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., if you have any other questions.