



**PRACTICAL CARE OF  
SOMEONE AT HOME  
AFTER THEIR DEATH**



# LEGALITIES

There is no time limit after death within which someone has to be buried or cremated.

You can keep someone at home between their death and funeral.

You can transport a dead body in any vehicle, as long as it is covered.

You can bury someone in a garden with permission from the local authority and SEPA and, of course, the landowner.

Funeral directors don't have to be involved, unless you want them to be\*.

Ashes can be scattered anywhere you like as long as you have the landowner's permission.

The Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 gives the possibility to name the person one wants to arrange their funeral, and a legal hierarchy of who can arrange the funeral otherwise. [not yet in force 10/18]

A death must be registered within 8 days - and before burial or cremation.

Nobody actually OWNS a dead body, but the person named as the Executor in the Will of the deceased, or if there is no Will, the person most entitled to be appointed Executor, has the right to decide how the body is to be cared for. Very often, that person happens to be the closest family member also.

\* or you need to use a private crematorium which insists that a funeral director arranges the cremation. (Not all crematoria do require this.)

# ADVANCE PREPARATION

It is not always possible to plan things in advance, and not always necessary. Your intuition and common sense will go a long way to getting you through in any case.

With a sudden or unexpected death, it may be an option to consider temporary use of a hospital mortuary or funeral home until you get organised. If you are planning to use a funeral director, be clear about exactly what you want them to do and how much it will cost.

There are a few advance preparations which are worth considering to smooth the journey and minimise the surprises along the way.

\* **Inform involved health professionals** about your plans. They may be able to speed verification and certification of death to suit. A doctor may remove a pacemaker/ ICD if needed. Try to obtain information about any implants which may cause a concern for cremation.

They may also give you continence and disposable bed pads and waterproof dressings and/or help with washing/ dressing if you wish.

\* **If transporting someone yourself from a hospital/ hospice/care home** check (a) if they have protocols you need to prepare for (eg contacting the police - although this is not legally required) and (b) whether they have staff who can assist with moving them to your vehicle.

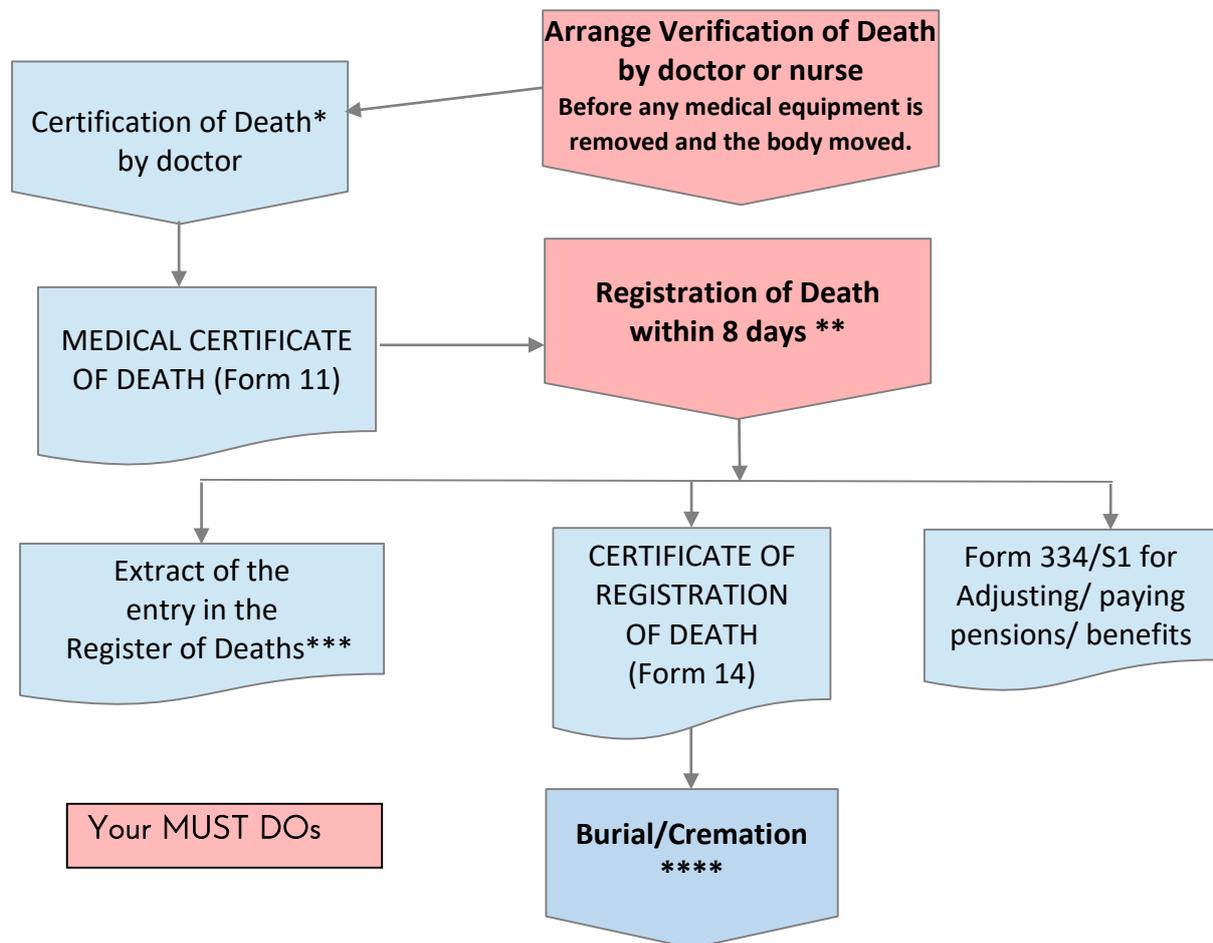
The death may have to be certified first, as this is the point at which a doctor decides whether the death will be referred to the Procurator Fiscal. Pick your battles.

- \* **Work out how you will cool their body.** Stock up with freezer blocks/gel packs if you are going to use them - get enough to allow for changeover. If this doesn't appeal then you can hire a room cooling unit from most Tool Hire shops.
  
- \* **Prepare your Home Death Kit** Be sure you can get continence pads.
  
- \* **Discuss plans** with family and others who will be involved after a death.
  
- \* **Buy a coffin or shroud** - ensure they meet any necessary criteria if you are planning a cremation or natural burial.
  
- \* **Moving the body/ coffin around the home** - consider a trial run, ideally with the people who will be doing it, to make sure you can get around corners etc.
  
- \* **Think about using a Funeral Director** - if you only want some services then be sure to find a flexible one, be clear about exactly what you want them to do and how much it will cost.
  
- \* **Think about the funeral timing** - if people need to travel back long distances, or there is another need to delay a communal gathering, then consider having an earlier, perhaps private, burial or cremation separate from a later memorial service or ceremony, perhaps with the ashes or at the grave.

# IMMEDIATELY AFTER A DEATH AT HOME

1. Note the time of death.
2. **STOP** - take as much time as you need to do whatever you need to do. It's not a time to "do the right thing". You need do nothing for several hours.
3. When you are ready, call the GP or out of hours service - they must visit to verify the death. Ask the approximate time they will come -sometimes this may take some time..
4. Don't move someone from their place of death, or remove any medical equipment until their death has been verified.
5. While you are waiting for verification of their death you can
  - lay their body in a straight line on their back- their head can be elevated slightly
  - close their mouth with a pillow or rolled-up handtowel under their chin or a scarf around their head
  - close their eyelids gently with your fingers - or try placing a bag of rice or pile of damp tissue over them
  - replace any dentures, using fixative if necessary
  - place a continence pad under their pelvis if there is not already one there.
6. Be prepared that rigor mortis (natural muscle stiffening) may start after about 3 hours but more usually 6.
7. Make plans for washing and dressing *if you want that to be done* - either do it yourself or get help from a community nurse or a funeral director. Choose if and when you would like a funeral director to visit and/or for their body to be removed. Note that there is usually an extra call out charge at night, and rarely any practical reason not to wait until morning.

# MUST DO LIST



\* If death is sudden, unexpected, suspicious, after discharge from hospital, or if a doctor has not seen the person within the past 14 days, then it is referred to the Procurator Fiscal. This may result in a Post-mortem examination but often, after a couple of days, is found to be due to natural causes.

\*\*A death can be registered at any registry office in Scotland. **You usually need to make an appointment.** Usually the nearest relative or executor does it, but anyone who has the necessary information can do it. (There can be exceptions to the 8 days eg when a postmortem is required.)

\*\*\*Consider paying for extra copies of the full Certificate of Registration of Death - banks, insurance companies etc often want an original copy.

\*\*\*\* No-one, including "next-of-kin" has a responsibility to arrange burial or cremation of someone's body, but they are responsible to pay for any arrangements they make to do so. The local authority has ultimate responsibility.

More information in "What to do after a death in Scotland" on Scottish Government website or tel 0131 244 2193 for a copy.

# HOME DEATH KIT

Most things you need are everyday items. If someone has been cared for at home, then it is very likely that the other items will already be in the house. If not, you can ask your community nurse to provide some of them.

If someone has been in hospital, then ask the nurses for supplies before leaving.

## For pre washing

absorbent bed/ continence pads, wet wipes, waterproof dressings, scissors, rubbish bag, disposable gloves, towels

## For washing

face cloths, towels, basin, soap or wet wipes, mouth wash/ sponges, new safety razor/ shaving cream, (denture fixative), (dry shampoo cap), hairbrush/ comb, vaseline, moisturising lotion, (nail clippers/file)

## For presentation

strong bed sheet, handkerchief, (scarf)  
insect repellent eg cedarwood oil

You may wish to use essential oils for antibacterial properties, insect repellent, odour control and a supportive atmosphere. You may also wish to decorate with flowers and candles.

# THINGS TO REMEMBER

## **FREEZER**

- cool from groin to neck
- prepare in advance

## **FLUIDS**

- press tummy before washing
- towel under face when turning body over
- apply a continence pad

## **FLIES**

- cover mouth/nose when unattended
- close windows or use net
- use insect repellent

**Did they wish for  
BODY/ ORGAN/  
TISSUE DONATION**

**Implants/ Pacemaker/ICD**

Only if the body is being cremated

# HANDY HINTS

## COOLING

Use picnic freezer blocks, gel packs, techni-ice  
Freeze plenty beforehand  
Wrap in a plastic bag/pillow case to reduce condensation

## CREMATION

Pacemakers/ ICDs **MUST** be removed.  
There are restrictions on clothing/items.  
Ask the crematorium for advice about  
any other implants.

## REMOVING MEDICAL DEVICES

**NEVER** do this until death has been verified  
Cut a urinary catheter with scissors  
and pull gently (some urine may come out)

## WASHING/ DRESSING

Always have at least 2 people  
Can use wet wipes/ foam spray/ dry shampoo  
Ensure any wounds (especially under the body) are sealed with waterproof  
tape or dressing  
Apply a continence pad and check every so often for leakage

## ODOURS

Use deodorising air freshener gels, incense sticks or candles  
Massage essential oils into the skin and/or drip around the body  
Put wood shavings in the base of the coffin – **NOT** for cremation

## CLOSING EYES/ MOUTH

Only necessary if causing distress to anyone  
Try raising head, towel under chin, scarf around head  
Try bag of rice over eyes, small piece of cotton wool  
under eyelid, or vaseline between lids

## FLIES

(maggots hatch within 2 days)  
Keep mouth/ nose well covered  
Can use UV fly killers or repellent  
Cedarwood oil around the body

## MOVING THE BODY

**NEVER** move from place of death until the death has been verified  
Can move a body in any car/van - it just needs to be covered  
Consider a trial run if moving in a coffin  
15st body requires 6 people to lift (depending on weight of any coffin)

## COFFINS/ SHROUDS

Crematoriums and natural burial grounds usually have criteria to meet  
Can be bought direct online  
If using a shroud for burial/cremation, wrap on the day of the funeral



This booklet was prepared by Pushing Up The Daisies to empower people to take care of someone after their death. It is a starting point to highlight the main practical points and is not a comprehensive guide.

For further information

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