

## How do I receive death benefits if the cause and manner of death is pending?

The “pending” death certificate is legal proof of death. Some insurance companies and financial institutions may accept pending death certificates for the purpose of paying benefits or handling other accounts. Additional documentations may be required and in some instances the Family Advocate is available to assist you with this matter.

## What is in the Medical Examiner Report and how do I obtain a copy?

A Medical Examiner Report is completed for all jurisdictional cases and summarizes the circumstances surrounding the death, medical and social histories, and forensic examination findings. The Medical Examiner Report may contain details about medical procedures, injuries, and medical findings which may be upsetting for some next of kin.

Copies of the report(s) are available upon completion of the case. Completion time will vary depending on the complexity, circumstances, and need for additional testing or investigation required for each individual case.. The OME strives to complete 90% of our cases within 90 days.

For updates on cause and manner of death and availability of the report, you can visit the Case Status feature on our website. You also may request a report on the website:

<https://www.maricopa.gov/468/Medical-Examiner>

Alternatively, you may contact Administrative Support Services at (602) 506-3322 to request a copy of the report. There is no fee to obtain a copy of the report if you are legal next of kin or if you request an electronic report.

## What is the role of the Family Advocate?

When someone suffers a loss, it is not uncommon to feel overwhelmed or like your life is out of control. The Family Advocate is available to speak with families, answer questions, and provide emotional support and resources.

## Case Information

Investigator(s): \_\_\_\_\_

OME Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_

If possible, please have case number available when contacting our office.

Family Advocate:  
(602) 506-3176

Maricopa County Department of Public Health,  
Office of Vital Registration (for death certificate):  
(602) 506-6805

### Additional Notes:

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**The Mission of the Maricopa County Office of the Medical Examiner is to provide professional medicolegal death investigations of individuals dying under statutorily defined circumstances, the results of which are communicated independently to relevant agencies, industries, and members of the public so they can receive accurate, timely, and effective communications that enhance the public’s safety and health.**

**We hold Service to be the highest of values. We commit to effective positive, ethical, and compassionate service to all members of the public.**



**MARICOPA COUNTY**  
**OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER**  
701 W. Jefferson St. Phoenix, AZ 85007  
**Telephone:** (602) 506-3322 or (602) 506-1138  
**FAX:** (602) 506-1546

Business Office Hours:  
Monday – Friday 8:00am – 4:00pm

Chief Medical Examiner and Director: Dr. Jeffrey Johnston

<https://www.maricopa.gov/468/Medical-Examiner>

## INFORMATION FROM THE MARICOPA COUNTY OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER (OME)

The death of a loved one can cause tremendous stress and sorrow. Everyone experiences a variety of physical and emotional responses.

This brochure is to help provide answers and to guide you when a loved one dies.

We hope it will assist you during the grieving process and answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the role of the Medical Examiner.

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## Why is the Office of the Medical Examiner Involved?

Arizona Revised Statute (A.R.S.) §11-593 requires that the following deaths be reported to the Office of the Medical Examiner:

- Death of person not under the current care of a health care provider as defined pursuant to section 36-3013.
- Death resulting from violence.
- Unexpected or unexplained death.
- Death of a person in a custodial agency as defined in section 13.4401.
- Unexpected or unexplained death of an infant or child.
- Death occurring in a suspicious, unusual or non-natural manner, including death from an accident believed to be related to the deceased person's occupation or employment.
- Death occurring as a result of anesthetic or surgical procedures.
- Death suspected to be caused by a previously unreported or undiagnosed disease that constitutes a threat to public safety.
- Death involving unidentifiable bodies.

It is up to the Medical Examiner to determine if a case meets jurisdictional requirements to further investigate and certify the cause and manner of death on the death certificate.

## Why is the death being investigated?

Medicolegal death investigations are conducted for the best interest of the public at large and only under the circumstances listed above. Not all investigations require examination of the decedent or a forensic autopsy.

If it is determined that the decedent requires examination, the body will be transported to 701 W. Jefferson St. Phoenix, AZ 85007.

## How is identification confirmed?

Your family member is identified through visual comparison to a legal form of identification, photograph identification by family, or forensic methods including fingerprints, DNA, dental charts, or other unique identifying marks. In situations where an immediate family member questions the identification or wishes to assist in the identification process, a written or electronic request can be submitted to request an identification meeting pursuant to A.R.S. §11-597.01

Note: The Office of the Medical Examiner is a forensic medical setting and only the viewing of a photograph is used for identification. Physical viewings are not allowed at this location.

## What types of exams are performed?

Each case is investigated on a case by case basis. If an examination is needed, it will be completed by a medical doctor who specializes in Forensic Pathology. The OME performs three types of examinations: autopsy, partial autopsy, and external examination. The Medical Examiner determines the exam type based on information gathered during the investigation. In order to meet our mission and statutory duties, an autopsy or partial autopsy may be required. Additionally, an autopsy may not always be completed if requested.

Please make the Investigator aware of any specific requests you have regarding the examination. The Medical Examiner will take family wishes into consideration; however, the Office of the Medical Examiner is not always able to accommodate these requests.

## How do I receive my family member's personal effects?

Any personal effects obtained by the OME will be released with the decedent to the selected funeral home/mortuary unless those items are deemed evidence, in which case they will be released to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

## What is the process for the release of my family member?

Release will occur after the Medical Examiner has completed the examination. To initiate the release process, the next of kin will need to contact a service provider (e.g. funeral home, mortuary, cremation society, transportation provider).

The mortuary, funeral home, or other service provider will follow up on behalf of the family to coordinate the release.

Your service provider also will request certain vital statistic information that must be recorded on the death certificate.

## How do I obtain a copy of the death certificate?

You may obtain a death certificate through your designated funeral home/mortuary or from the Maricopa County Department of Public Health, Office of Vital Records. The OME is responsible for completing the medical portion of the death certificate within 72 hours of the examination (excluding weekends and holidays), in compliance with A.R.S. §36-325. In some cases, a specific cause and/or manner of death is unable to be determined after examination without further laboratory testing or investigation. In those instances, the cause and manner of death are listed as "Pending". Once the investigation is concluded, an amendment to the death certificate is filed with the Office of Vital Records. The funeral home/mortuary is responsible for completing the demographic portion of the death certificate.

A death certificate can be requested in-person or online. Please visit the website for additional information <http://maricopavitalrecords.com/>