

What is an autopsy and why is it done?

An autopsy is a surgical procedure that is done after a person has died. Many people have never thought about whether they would agree to an autopsy for a loved one. An autopsy may be helpful to:

- Get information about the cause of death.
- Learn about diseases that are inherited. These diseases may affect other members of the family.
- Learn more about diseases.
- Understand an unexpected death.
- Look at the quality and effects of medical care.

What is learned from doing an autopsy can help to treat and care for other people.

Who can consent to an autopsy? How soon is consent needed?

- When the medical examiner will do an autopsy for legal reasons, consent is not needed.
- If the medical examiner has not ordered an autopsy, a parent, or the person legally responsible for making decisions for a patient, must give consent for an autopsy. The consent can be for a:
 - Limited autopsy. This looks at only some areas of the body.
 - Complete autopsy. This looks at the whole body.
- Most often a decision about an autopsy needs to be made within a few hours of death. More time may be given, if needed.

How is an autopsy done?

There are several parts to an autopsy.

- **External exam.** This may include photos, x-rays, and an exam of the skin.
- **Internal exam.** Surgical cuts are made to examine and weigh the organs. Tissue and bodily fluids may be collected for more testing or research.

Who does the autopsy?

It is done by a doctor called a pathologist. This doctor has special training in the nature and cause of disease.

When will I get the results?

The completed written report is ready in about 90 days. Either the healthcare provider who ordered the autopsy or the bereavement coordinator will contact you once the report is complete.

What effect might an autopsy have on the funeral?

- Most often, an autopsy is done within 24 hours of the pathologist getting the body. This often would not delay the funeral.
- If your religion or cultural belief calls for an immediate burial, we will work with you and the funeral home to return your child as soon as possible.
- No cuts are made to the face or hands.

How much does it cost?

There is no cost to you or your family.

Will any research be done with the child's body?

Research will only be done with your permission. Tissues, organs, or fluids, like blood, may be collected for research purposes. This helps doctors:

- Learn about diseases.
- Compare tissue affected by disease to healthy, normal tissue.
- Learn about how the body grows and works.

Where will the tissue or organs be stored?

Keeping extra samples is called specimen or tissue banking. Samples, like blood or tissue, are kept in a lab. They are used in future research studies. Only those with special permission by a research committee can use them.

Who can help with this process?

We know that this is a very hard time for you and your family. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to our Children's Bereavement Program. Please know you are not alone. We are here to support you and your family during this time.

To contact our bereavement team:

- Call 414-266-2995
- Email: griefsupport@chw.org