

What is the Coroner's Office and why is it involved?

The Coroner's Office is directed by the Coroner, who is an Elected Official of the County of Berks. The Coroner's Office is required by law in Pennsylvania to investigate the circumstances of certain types of deaths to determine the cause and manner of the death. Cases requiring a Coroner's investigation are:

- Any unusual or unexplained death
- Sudden unexplained death when in good health
- Any violent death, i.e. homicide, suicide or accident
- Death of a person not under the recent care of a doctor
- Any death under suspicious circumstances
- Any death while in prison or the custody of police, sheriff, etc.

Are autopsies always performed in Coroner cases?

No. A Coroner's investigation gathers the information concerning the circumstances of the death, medical history and social history of decedent.

If there is sufficient medical history and no evidence of foul play, an autopsy is not usually performed. If, however, there is any evidence of foul play or the circumstances of the death are unusual, an autopsy is usually performed to determine the cause of death.

If there is no suspicion of foul play and there is natural disease sufficient to account for the death, the Coroner's Office will release the body to a funeral home without an autopsy. If the family wants an autopsy in these cases, they may

contact a private pathologist for a private autopsy. This can usually be done through any hospital's pathology department. **There is a cost to the family for a private autopsy.** There is no charge to the family for a coroner's autopsy. The decision to perform an autopsy rests with the Coroner's Office.

Family and religious objections may be noted, but an autopsy may be required if it is deemed necessary by the Coroner's Office.

Will autopsy prevent an open casket funeral or delay funeral services?

No. Autopsies are performed in a professional manner that does not interfere with viewing your loved one. Most autopsies are performed within a few days of the death, and do not interfere with the funeral services.

Where will my loved one be taken?

The remains will be taken a secure morgue (closed to the public) at Reading Hospital.

When will my loved one be released by the Coroner's Office?

The remains will be released to the funeral home of your choice, after our preliminary investigation, which may include toxicology and/or autopsy (when necessary) is completed. Autopsies are scheduled by our forensic pathologist as soon as possible. Occasionally, some cases take longer than others, depending on the investigation required.

Is viewing allowed before my choice of a funeral home?

No. Only in extreme, unusual and rare circumstances is limited viewing allowed by the Coroner's Office. An arrangement for viewing at the funeral home is strongly encouraged.

What about my loved one's personal effects?

The Coroner by law is required to secure personal effects and property on or about the decedent for a period of one year, unless claimed sooner by a legal representative of the deceased.

What if there are no funds for cremation or burial?

If the legal next of kin does not have sufficient funds for burial or cremation, there are several options that may be available. One alternative is scientific donation. Most donation agencies will cremate at no charge and return the cremains to the family. If donation is not an option, consider a fundraising website or donations from friends and family.

How long does it take for the Death Certificate to be completed?

The Coroner's Office must issue a Death Certificate within 96 hours. If the cause and manner is not known at this time, a pending Death Certificate is issued so there is no delay in funeral services. When the Coroner investigation is completed, which may include toxicology results, autopsy findings, police investigations and other investigations as determined, the final Death Certificate will be issued. In some cases, this may take 8 to 12 weeks or longer.

How do I obtain a copy of the Death Certificate?

Death Certificates are not issued by the Coroner's Office. We complete only a portion, which consists of the date and time of death, the cause and manner of death, the identity of the deceased and any injuries, if sustained, within 96 hours. It is then given to the funeral home to complete their portion. The funeral home forwards it to the local registrar, who files it with the Commonwealth. The funeral home will assist you in obtaining certified copies. Additional copies can be purchased online at www.health.state.pa.us/vitalrecords.

The businesses/agencies presented in this pamphlet are for information purposes only and are not an endorsement for any one specific business/agency.
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Berks County Area Funeral Homes

All County Cremation 3300 Kutztown Rd. Laureldale 844.527.8947
Apyre NCS 625 Port Reading Ave. New Jersey 855-812-7973
Auman 235-247 Penn St. Reading 610.374.4505
Auman 390 W. Neversink Rd. Reading 610.370.0200
Bean 6 Fairlane Rd. Reading 610.779.2800
Bean 1605 Rockland St. Reading 610.376.0985
Bean 129 E. Lancaster Ave. Shillington 610.376.1120
Bean 3825 Penn Ave. Sinking Spring 610.376.1129
Bednar 2910 Pricetown Rd. Temple 610-741-6993
Burkey & Driscoll 40 S. 4th St. Hamburg 610.562.2955
Catagnus-Gilbertsville 1020 E. Phila. Ave. 610-323-4440
Catagnus-Pottstown 711 N. Franklin St. 610-367-0593
Catagnus-Royersford 329 N. Lewis Rd. 610-948-1950
Cole 402 E. Penn Ave. Robesonia 610.693.6347
Cramp-Hummel 943 Centre Ave. Reading 610.375.4337
Cremation Society of Berks Co 423 Main St Oley 844.527.8947
Dengler-Sowers 144 N. Spruce St. Birdsboro 610.582.2292
Feeney 625 N. 4th St. Reading 610.372.4160
Gallman-Sonoski 910 Chestnut St. Reading 610.373.4653
Giles & Yeckley 21 Chestnut St. Mohnton 610.777.2331
Harris 222-224 N. Front St. Reading 610.372.5454
Henninger 229 N. 5th St. Reading 610.373-4500
Hildenbrand 346 W. Main St. Kutztown 610.683.3526
Hill PO Box 233 Rehrersburg 717.933.4316

Houck & Grofus Pottstown 610-323-8220
Kirkhoff 206 N. Main St. Bernville 610.488.1611
Klee 1 E. Lancaster Ave. Shillington 610.777.7688
Kopicki-Bradley 239 S. 9th St. Reading 610.372.1730
Kuhn 739 Penn Ave. West Reading 610.374.5440
Kuhn 5153 Kutztown Rd. Temple 610.921.2225
Labs 141 Pequa Ave. Honey Brook 610-273-3924
Lamm & Witman 243 W Penn Ave. Wernersville 610.678.3461
Leibensperger 65 S. 4th St. Hamburg 610.562.7823
Leibensperger 223 Peach St. Leesport 610.926.2737
Ludwick 333 Greenwich St. Kutztown 610.683.8111
Ludwick 25 E. Weis St. Topton 610.682.2434
Lutz 2100 Perkiomen Ave. Reading 610.376.7121
Mae Stump 117 West Main St. Fleetwood 610-944-7621
Milkins Trymbiski 4914 Kutztown Rd. Temple 610.921.3121
Morrell 124 W. Philadelphia Ave. Boyertown 610.367.2271
Mull 27 E. High St. Womelsdorf 610.589.2821
On Line Cremations (Kuhn) Temple 610-898-4230
Ott 111 N. Reading Ave. Boyertown 610.367.2345
Reading Cremation Society 5th St. Reading 610-750-5057
Sanders 1501-1503 N. 11th St. Reading 610.372.1624
Schumacher/Benner Pottstown 610-326-5755
Stanton 141 Pequa Honey Brook 610-273-3399
Stitzel 3300 Kutztown Rd. Laureldale 610.929.3693
Stitzel 423 Main St. Oley 610.987.6231
Walbert 14390 Kutztown Rd. Fleetwood 610.944.9900
Whelan-Schwartz 444 N. 9th St. Reading 610.374.0962

Other helpful phone numbers

Body Donations

Humanity Gifts Registry 215.922.4440
Science Care 800.417.3747
Anatomy Gifts Registry 800.300.5433
MedCure 866.560.2525
International Institute for the Advancement of Medicine (IIAM) 800.486.4426

Berks County Veteran's Affairs 610.378.5601

Bereavement Support

MADD Berks Co. 610.372.6233
Greater Reading Mental Health Alliance 610.775.3000
Tower Health 484.628.8000
Penn State Health St. Joseph 610.378.2000
SHARE – Pregnancy & Infant Loss 800.821.6819
SIDS/PA 800.721.7437
GRASP 610.334.9845 or 610.587.5361

John A. Fielding III

Coroner

Berks County Coroner

1047 MacArthur Road, Suite 200

Reading, PA 19605

610.478.3280



On behalf of myself and my staff, please accept our condolences for the loss of your loved one, and our deepest sympathy to you, your family and friends at this very difficult time.

We hope this pamphlet may be helpful in answering some of your questions.

If you need additional information, contact my staff at any time. Our office works a 24/7 schedule. General office hours are Monday thru Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm but the office is staffed 24/7. Please call the office at 610.478.3280; if no one is available, leave a message and a Deputy will return your call as soon as possible.