

Charleston County Coroner's Office Policy #43

Title: Toxicology and Other Samples

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Authorized By: Bobbi Jo O'Neal, Coroner

43.1 POLICY

Where body fluids and/or tissue samples are available and a decedent's death is under investigation where either a full autopsy, or external exam has been authorized or other circumstances where toxicological results are desired, toxicological samples will be collected and submitted for analysis as directed by either the case Deputy, Chief Deputy, or the Coroner.

43.2 PROCEDURE

1. The forensic pathologist or their designee or the Coroner's Office autopsy technicians at the direction of the Coroner or her designee will draw body fluids and/or tissue samples for toxicological testing and/or collect samples for a sexual assault, if necessary, during the autopsy or external exam where possible/feasible and prescribed. Peripheral blood rather than central blood should be used for toxicological testing whenever possible.
2. In the cases involving a decedent's hospital admission prior to death where initial blood and/or urine samples are available, the deputy coroner shall issue a subpoena for those initial samples and those earliest samples should be sent for testing when appropriate.

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3. The Coroner's designee will submit body fluids and/or tissue samples to NMS Labs (National Medical Services, Inc.), the State Law Enforcement Division, or any other laboratory as indicated under refrigerated/cool temperatures. The Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit (if used, or other appropriate samples) will be submitted to SLED or the local law enforcement agency for security and storage. The Coroner may, at her discretion, direct samples to a particular facility for testing.

4. Toxicology specimens may include some or all the following samples where available and prescribed by the pathologist, Coroner, or her designee: blood, urine, liver, vitreous humor, stomach contents, brain, and bile. Additional/alternative specimens may include muscle, spleen, and kidney. All decedents requiring an autopsy shall also have a complete toxicological analysis where appropriate specimens are available.

5. National Medical Services, Inc. is accredited by the International Organization of Standardization.

6. The Forensic Services Laboratory at the State Law Enforcement Division is nationally accredited by the American Society of Crime Laboratories/Laboratory Accreditation Board.

7. The results of those tests will be sent to the Deputy Coroner and the forensic pathologist if services are performed by the pathologist, otherwise they will be sent to the Coroner/Deputy Coroner. All tests may be interpreted by other specialists as indicated.

8. It is the policy of this office to collect blood samples in accordance with the laws of this state.

9. When the circumstances surrounding the death involve a suspicion of drug use, or as otherwise directed by the Coroner, and appropriate blood samples can be obtained, the sample may be analyzed in the Randox MultiStat machine to produce presumptive results. The results of the test shall be recorded in the case file.

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10. Back-up samples shall be collected when possible and stored in the secure evidence room under refrigeration/freezing conditions as necessary to properly preserve the samples until such time as the case deputy authorizes disposal at least 12 months after the start of the investigation.