

Shelby County Coroner's Office

100 W College St BUTCH ELLIS BLD ROOM 107

Columbiana, Alabama 35051

Office # 205-669-3846

How certain circumstances are handled by the coroner's office

- (1) **No Autopsy or Toxicology-** Decedent released to funeral home of family's choice. Death certificate filled out by funeral home, sent to coroner's office, signed and sent to the Shelby County Health Department with Cause and Manner of Death.
- (2) **No Autopsy, but Toxicology-** Specimen taken and then decedent released to funeral home of family's choice. Specimen submitted to the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences. Death certificate filled out by funeral home, sent to coroner's office, signed and sent to the Shelby County Health Department with cause and manner of death Pending. **Results for Toxicology can take approximately 6 months**. Death certificate amended with cause and manner of death and sent to Vital Statistics in Montgomery New death certificate available in approximately **7-10 days**.
- (3) **Autopsy and Toxicology to be done by the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences in Montgomery-**Decedent released to funeral home of family's choice. Death certificate filled out by funeral home, sent to coroner's office, signed and sent to the Shelby County Health Department with cause and manner of death **if known** otherwise it will be Pending Toxicology and Microscopic Examination. **Results for Autopsy and Toxicology take approximately 6 months**. If death certificate needs to be amended with cause and manner of death, it will be sent to Vital Statistics in Montgomery and a new death certificate will be available in approximately **7-10 days**.
- (4) Coroner's report, autopsy and toxicology results may be released to next of kin when they become available
- (5) We apologize for the extended waiting period for autopsy and toxicology results. This is due to the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences being responsible for doing autopsies for 66 of the 67 counties in Alabama.
- (6) We are here to assist you in any way possible and we appreciate your cooperation.

**To pick up a death certificate locally : Shelby County Health Department
2000 County Services Dr, Pelham, AL Tel: 205-620-1650**

What Is the Coroner's Office and why is it Involved In this death?

The job of the coroner, by law, is to investigate the circumstances of certain types of deaths in order to determine the cause of death and the manner of death.

Cases which require a coroner's Investigation are:

- Sudden, unexpected death when in apparent good health.
- Death of a person who is not under the recent care of a physician.
- Any violent death (homicide, suicide, accident). Any death suspicious for violence.
- Any unusual or unexplained death.

Are autopsies always performed in coroner's cases?

No. A coroner's investigator gathers the information concerning the circumstances of death, the medical history, and the social history. If there is sufficient medical history and the circumstances of death are consistent with a death due to the known medical problems, OR/and if there is no evidence of foul play, an autopsy is not usually performed. If, however, there is any evidence of foul play or if the circumstances of the death are unusual, an autopsy is usually performed to determine the cause of death and the manner of death. *NOTE: The decision to perform an autopsy rests with the Coroner's Office. Family objections may be noted, but an autopsy may be required to help determine the cause and manner of the death.*

If there is no suspicion of foul play OR/and there is natural disease sufficient to account for the demise, the Coroner's Office may release the body to the funeral home without an autopsy. If the family wants an autopsy in these cases, they may contact a private pathologist for a private autopsy. Private autopsy services may be obtained through UAB Department of Pathology 205-934-4303. There is a fee for private autopsies which varies depending upon the pathologist. An autopsy will not prevent an open casket funeral.

Where will the body of my loved one be taken?

The body will be taken to the Shelby County Morgue at Shelby Baptist Hospital in Alabaster. Please do not come to the morgue. You will not be allowed to see your loved one.

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

The body will be released to the funeral home of your choice following completion of the autopsy. Depending upon the day of the week and the time of day that the coroner is notified of the death, the body may be released on the day of notification or the next day (except on Saturday when the body will be held until Monday since autopsies are not routinely performed on Sunday). Occasionally the body may be held longer in cases where additional investigation is required.

Is it necessary for me to go to the Coroner's Office to identify the body?

No. In most cases visual identification is not required.

Is viewing or visitation allowed at the Coroner's Office?

No. The Coroner's Office is not designed to handle bereaved relatives. Only in extremely unusual and rare circumstances is viewing allowed on a very limited basis at the Coroner's Office. Arrangements for viewing at the funeral home should be made with the funeral director.

What do I do now?

As soon as possible, a funeral home should be selected to handle the arrangements. When you contact the funeral director, advise them that the deceased is under the jurisdiction of the Shelby County Coroner's Office. The funeral director will contact our office and make arrangements to have your loved one picked up.

How do I obtain a copy of the death certificate?

Death certificates are not issued by the Coroner's Office. You may request a copy from the funeral home when arrangements are made.

How long does it take for the death certificate to be completed?

If the cause and manner of death are obvious following completion of the autopsy, the death certificate may be completed as soon as it is sent from the funeral home to our office. In some cases additional tests may be required to determine the cause of death and manner of death such as toxicology and microscopic studies. In these cases, completion of the death certificate will not be possible until the additional studies are completed, which can take up to 6 MONTHS.

Why do these reports take so long?

DFS services 66 of 67 Alabama counties. The tests that are submitted to Montgomery and Hoover DFS labs can have a substantial backlog due to the number of cases submitted each day. We apologize for this and ask you to bear with us as we try to work through the case load.

When will the autopsy report be ready and how do I obtain a copy?

When all studies are complete, the autopsy report will be finalized and signed by the pathologist who did the autopsy. Copies of the autopsy report may be obtained from the Coroner's Office. Autopsy reports on cases under investigation are not public records and are not released to anyone other than law enforcement agencies.