

Post-Mortem Examination

Policy:

Examination Preparation

- The attending Board Certified Forensic Pathologist will be briefed prior to autopsy regarding the circumstances surrounding the case including photographs and records.
- Unless otherwise requested by the board-certified forensic pathologist, the body will be prepped by Coroner Staff prior to the Forensic Pathologist arriving for autopsy. This includes:
 - Photographs of the body as received
 - Removal of clothing
 - Clothing should be removed carefully and without necessary cutting or tearing.
 - All pockets will be thoroughly examined and any found objects will be documented photographically.
 - Photographs of clothing individually
 - Place clothing in a red biohazard bag. The clothing will remain with the body following autopsy
 - Clean the body followed by photographs of the body (front and back side)
 - Photographs with and without scale of trauma, scars, marks
 - Photographs of each tattoo
 - X-rays of body (if required or requested by pathologist)
 - Infants, homicides, suspicious deaths, multiple gunshot wounds require full body x-rays
 - Upload x-rays to MDI-log and have x-rays available for pathologist to review
 - Collect toxicology samples except vitreous: blood, urine, DNA sample
 - Obtain fingerprints
 - Measure body length and document
 - Photograph and document property on body
 - Drugs that are illicit or prescription found on body will be released to the local law enforcement for destruction.
- For photographs of the body, grey boards will be used to omit any background artifact from the photos.
- The attending Board Certified Forensic Pathologist must personally examine all external aspects of the body in advance of the dissection.

Post-Mortem Examination cont.

Internal Examination

- During the internal examination, the Coroner staff will work at the direction of the board certified forensic pathologist.
- Required photos at autopsy include:
 - The chest reflected
 - After the chest plate is removed
 - Scalp reflected
 - Brain in situ
 - Brain removed

Specimen Collection

- For all cases that undergo a postmortem examination, a DNA card will be retained indefinitely.
- Specimen collection may include peripheral blood, central blood or spleen squeeze for toxicological testing. In addition vitreous humor and urine may be collected in specific cases or at the direction of the forensic board certified forensic pathologist.
- The container will be labeled with the case number, date of collection, and decedent's name.
- Specimens retained will be labeled with the case number, date of examination, and decedent's name.
- The specimens will be stored at the Coroner's Office as required by RCW.

Evidence Collection

- Any and all evidence collection will be at the direction of the forensic board certified forensic pathologist.
- Evidence collected will be released to the law enforcement of jurisdiction following the autopsy.
- Sexual assault kits will be provided by the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction attending the autopsy.

Fingerprinting

- A print of the decedent's index finger and thumb from both hands if applicable, will be obtained on all cases.
- Cases that are homicides or suspicious in nature will require ten prints to be obtained if possible.
 - The prints will be submitted to Washington State Patrol ID Unit or the FBI for identification purposes.
- All prints obtained will remain in the case file as well as be scanned and uploaded to the case management system under the documents section.

Post-Mortem Examination Cont.

Toxicology Laboratory Services

- As per RCW 68.50.107, the Skagit County Coroner's Office is required to submit all necessary toxicology testing to the Washington State Toxicology Laboratory, an accredited and certified laboratory.
- The Washington State Toxicology Laboratory will supply the necessary shipping containers.
- The Laboratory will perform testing on the specimens and provide a final report when testing is complete.
- The report will be provided to the forensic board-certified forensic pathologist for review and opinion.
- The Washington State Toxicology Laboratory will contact the Coroner's Office regarding any retention or destruction of already processed specimens.
- All specimens will be obtained during an internal or external examination and will be stored in a freezer within the Coroner's Office.

Histology

- Histology services are provided by Northwest Pathology Services, a certified laboratory.
- The laboratory will receive cassettes from the Coroner and perform histological services on specimens collected by the board certified forensic pathologist and will provide slides and paraffin blocks for each cassette submitted.
- Histology slides/paraffin blocks will be stored indefinitely within the Coroner's Office.