

PEACEFUL PASSAGE AT HOME

Caring for our own after death

When the Death Occurs in a Hospital

To obtain the forms listed below go to:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/admin/dmoa/vitals/edrs/>

The body will most likely be moved to the morgue within a very short time after death. The family needs to inform the hospital (Operations Director or other official) that they plan on acting as their own funeral director. The body can be held in the morgue for the time needed to do the paperwork.

The first response from the hospital likely will be that they can only release a body to a funeral director. That is not true. The family should bring certain documents with them to assert firmly that they can act as their own funeral director and have the right to take the body from the hospital to either the home for a home wake or directly to the final disposition, the crematory or cemetery.

Necessary documents to make the case if you face resistance:

- MA Law: malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleVII/Chapter46/Section9
- MA Executive Office of Health and Human Service (EOHHS) Guidelines: <http://www.mass.gov/guides/issues-to-consider-in-preparing-for-disposition-of-decedents>

If necessary, ask the hospital staff to call this government official, who will verify that families have the right to act as their own funeral directors:

Karin Barrett, M.Ed.
Deputy State Registrar
Registry of Vital Records and Statistics
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
150 Mt. Vernon Street, 1st floor

Dorchester, MA 02125

Karin.Barrett@massmail.state.ma.us

617-740-2621

Here are two funeral directors in MA to call who know the law and can verify that families have this right. They can speak directly to officials in the hospital.

– Peter Stefan – Graham, Putnam and Mahoney – 508-754-1717

– John Anderson – Anderson-Bryant – 781-438-0135

Paperwork necessary for release of the body from the hospital:

- Death Certificate generated through the EDRS
- Burial Transit Permit – which allows the family to transport the body to the crematory or cemetery
- A Release of Liability might be requested by the hospital

The hospital, soon after the death has inputted the necessary information electronically into the Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS). The town clerk can access the EDRS, but will need the full biographical information to complete the death certificate from the family.

You will be working with the Town Clerk in the town where the death occurs. We have found the best approach is to try to inform the Town Clerk, as early as possible, that the family will be acting as their own funeral director and therefore they will be expected to input the death certificate into the Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS).

Before the death, the family should fill out the 5-page [Informant Worksheet for Certificate of Death](#), which spells out all the biographical information the Town Clerk will need, and the [Veteran Information Worksheet](#) (if applicable). It may be that the dying person has some of the information that will be needed on these documents.

Paperwork process after death:

1. Visit the Town Clerk and bring with you:
 - [Informant Worksheet for Certificate of Death](#) filled out by the family

- [Veteran Information Worksheet](#) (if applicable)
- [Funeral Provider Worksheet](#) – Provides the town clerk with the name of the cemetery or crematory that the family has chosen

The town clerk may have never had the request for paperwork from a family regarding a death certificate since this is usually done by a funeral director. You may want to bring a copy of the law and the EOHHS guidelines. It will be helpful to have the [list of other clerks](#) who have assisted families with this paperwork.

2. When the Town Clerk calls, return to Town Hall to sign the [Death Certificate Informant Verification and Signature Form](#), which they will provide. Your signature means that all the information is correct.
3. The Town Clerk will call to say that the paperwork has been completed, submitted to the burial agent (board of health) and the Burial Transit Permit and Death Certificate are ready to be picked up. These documents allow the family to transport the body. Crematories and cemeteries have their own individual paperwork that must be filled out. We suggest you call them ahead of time.
4. The family then takes these documents back to the hospital. At the time of the release of the body the hospital may ask you to sign a release of liability. That covers them in case there are any problems with the transport out of the hospital.

By law the family must bring a “rigid container” with them, a casket, cremation box etc. With prior notice a gurney can be provided by the morgue to move the deceased into a suitable vehicle.