

The Coroner

Coroners operate within a legal framework and have a duty to investigate all deaths of unknown cause, violent or unnatural deaths and deaths that occur in custody.

The coroner investigates deaths in order to establish who, where and when a person died and how, meaning by what means, a person has died. It may be necessary for a CT scan, or a more rarely, post mortem examination to be carried out to determine the cause of death.

Certain deaths require an inquest that will be conducted in a local court by the coroner.

Deaths that need to be reported to the coroner

The registrar will report the following deaths to the coroner if not already reported to by someone else:

- where there is no doctor who can issue a medical certificate of cause of death
- where the deceased was not seen by the doctor issuing the medical certificate either after death or within 28 days before the death
- where the cause of death is unknown
- where the cause of death is believed to be unnatural or suspicious
- where the death occurred during an operation or before recovery from an anaesthetic
- where the death is due to industrial disease or industrial poisoning

The Coroner's Officers

The coroner is assisted in his work by coroner's officers and support staff. They receive reports of deaths, make inquiries on behalf of the coroner and liaise with relatives.

The coroner is also helped by Police Coroner's Officers, who are specially trained to work with relatives, arrange formal identification of bodies and take statements.

When the funeral can be held

If the coroner's investigation, a CT scan or a post mortem reveal that the death was due to natural causes the coroner's enquires will cease and the coroner will release the body to the next of kin, executors or administrators. The death can then be registered with the Registrar of Births Marriages and Deaths and the funeral can then take place. A registrar cannot register the death or issue a death certificate until the body is released by the coroner.

If an inquest is needed, a death cannot be registered until the inquest has been completed. In these circumstances, the coroner will usually issue a certificate that will allow the funeral to take place.

Non-invasive post mortem examinations

Non-suspicious deaths will usually be investigated by way of a non-invasive post mortem or CT scan. Consequently, in the majority of cases, an invasive autopsy will not be needed in order to determine the cause of death. The coroner does not legally require the consent of the next of kin for any type of post mortem but will listen to objections that the family wish to raise. The coroner's officer will discuss with the family of the deceased what type of post mortem is to be undertaken

and why this is necessary. Non-suspicious deaths will now, initially, use a non-invasive post mortem examination.

In a limited number of cases a cause of death will not be able to be determined from a CT scan and the coroner may need to ask a pathologist to conduct a limited or full invasive post mortem. Copies of the CT/post mortem report will normally be available to the next of kin and to certain other properly interested persons. A fee may be payable.

What is the function of an inquest?

The function of an inquest is to record:

- who the deceased was
- when, where and how he or she came by the medical cause of death
- a conclusion and then the coroner records the details needed for the registration of the death

It is not the function of an inquest to determine any question of civil liability or criminal liability on the part of a named person.

The stages of Coronial Inquests:

- **Inquest opening:** all inquests have to have a formal opening. This is usually a short hearing in court with a Coroner, the court usher and a Police Coroner's Officer.
- **Pre-inquest hearing:** the Coroner and legal representatives review the case and check to make sure all investigations are due to be completed in time for the final hearing. Not all cases will have a pre-inquest hearing.
- **Final inquest hearing:** the end of the process when the Coroner has accumulated all the information they need to record a conclusion. This will enable the Registrars to produce the final death certificate.

Access to medical records

Medical records remain confidential after death. However, the coroner has powers to request medical information that is relevant and necessary to their enquiries.

Taking the body abroad or bringing it back to the UK

If you wish to take the body abroad, you must give written notice to the coroner. The coroner will advise when the body can be released to be taken abroad.

If you wish to bring the body back to England or Wales, the coroner may need to be involved. In certain circumstances, an inquest may be necessary.

Reporting treasure finds to the coroner

The coroner also deals with finds that may be classed as treasure.

There are currently **83 coroner areas** across England and Wales and each jurisdiction is locally funded. In Manchester and Lancashire are:

Bolton Coroner's Court

This Area covers Greater Manchester West (Bolton, Salford, Wigan and Leigh.)

https://www.bolton.gov.uk/directory/9/coroners_hearings

Blackpool Coroner's Court

This area covers Blackpool and Fylde

<https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Life-events/HM-Coroner-Blackpool-and-Fylde.aspx>

Greater Manchester Coroner's Court

This area covers Manchester City

https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/626/coroners/5720/court_diary

Greater Manchester South Coroner's Court

This area covers Greater Manchester South (Stockport, Trafford and Tameside).

<http://www.coronersmanchestersouth.org.uk/>

Lancashire Coroner's Court

This area covers Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/births-marriages-and-deaths/deaths/coroners/>

Rochdale Coroner's Court

This area covers Greater Manchester North (Rochdale, Bury and Oldham).

<https://www.rochdale.gov.uk/coroners/inquest-hearings>

Note:- Dates of inquests may change at short notice.