

# Death overseas



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office



The death of a relative or friend is always distressing, but if it happens abroad the distress can be made worse by practical problems.

After the death of a relative or friend abroad you are likely to have countless questions. What should I do now? How can I communicate with people in a foreign language? Who can I turn to for help?

This leaflet explains what practical support British consular staff can offer you and what you need to do yourself.

# Death overseas – information for relatives and friends

## If a relative or friend dies while you are abroad with them

All deaths must be registered in the country where the death occurs. Your tour guide, the local police or the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can advise you on how to go about this.

Make sure you have as much documentation as possible about the person who has died and yourself. This should include:

- > full name
- > date of birth
- > passport number
- > the name of the next of kin of the person who has died.

If the person suffered from an infectious condition, for example Hepatitis or HIV viruses, it is essential that the authorities are told so that they can take precautions against infection.

You do not have to register a death at the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate, but by doing so, you will obtain a death registration document and a permanent copy of it will always be available in English from the General Register Office in the UK.

In Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa and UK overseas territories British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates cannot currently issue death certificates. Local ones are sufficient for British purposes.

## **If a relative or friend dies abroad while you are in the UK**

- > If the death has been reported to a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate overseas we will pass the details to the UK police and ask them to tell the next of kin as soon as possible. If the next of kin are not in the UK, we will normally ask our consular staff in the country where they are to contact local police to do this.
- > We do everything we can to make sure that, as next of kin, you do not hear of the death first from the media, but we cannot always influence this. In exceptional circumstances, to act rapidly, this may mean having to inform relatives by telephone.
- > If you hear of the death from a tour operator, the media or any other third party you should contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on 020 7008 1500 and ask for the country desk in Consular Directorate.
- > Consular staff in London will keep in touch with the family and our staff abroad until burial or cremation overseas (where local authorities allow these for foreigners) or until the person has been brought back to the UK.
- > Consular staff in London will pass on to our staff overseas the wishes of the next of kin about funeral arrangements.
- > We will do our best to make sure these wishes are carried out.
- > But it is not always possible to do so. For example there may be no facilities for cremation. And in some countries post mortem examinations are carried out without

permission of the next of kin. You should be aware that in some countries organs will be removed and kept during these procedures without the next of kin being informed or consulted. You should also be aware that in some countries a lack of suitable storage may make it impossible to obtain the necessary international certificates to transport the body.

## Where you can find us

Support is provided by British diplomatic and consular missions overseas and by the Consular Directorate of the FCO in London. British diplomatic missions overseas are the British Government's main offices in other countries, usually in capital cities. These take the form of **British High Commissions** or **Deputy High Commissions** in Commonwealth countries and **British Embassies** in other countries. You may also find **British Consulates General** or **Consulates** in capital cities or regional centres. In some places where there is no British diplomatic or consular office, we have **Honorary Consuls** who can offer some limited help or put you in touch with the nearest office. Check the FCO website: [www.gov.uk/fco](http://www.gov.uk/fco).

## What kind of help we can provide when someone has died abroad

We can:

- > keep the next of kin informed and try to ensure you don't feel that you are on your own
- > tell you the cost of local burial, local cremation and transportation of the body and personal belongings back to the UK
- > provide a list of local and international funeral directors (see note 1). If an English speaking firm is not available, our staff can help you with the arrangements
- > help transfer money from friends and relatives in the UK to pay any necessary costs.

A coroner in England and Wales will normally hold an inquest if a person died a violent or unnatural death overseas and the body is returned to the coroner's district. Different procedures for investigating deaths apply in each part of the UK. We have a booklet called 'Guide for bereaved families', which is available on the gov.uk website **[www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)**.

In the case of a major catastrophe or terrorist attack, local practices may change, and there may be delays with bodies being returned to the UK due to identification procedures.

### **Note 1:**

Neither the Government nor the relevant British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can make any guarantee in relation to the professional ability or character of any person or company on the list, nor can they be held responsible in any way for you relying on any advice you are given.

## **Murder or manslaughter overseas-how UK authorities can help**

The FCO, the UK Police and the Coroners of England and Wales may all have a role to play when a British National dies overseas in these circumstances. There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the minimum standards of help you can expect from these authorities on **[www.gov.uk/government/publications/murder-manslaughter-and-infanticide-of-british-nationals-abroad](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/murder-manslaughter-and-infanticide-of-british-nationals-abroad)** in the section 'Coping with death overseas'.

Where there is evidence of suspicious circumstances concerning the death, we can give you support and suggest the best way to raise concerns with the local authorities. We can offer basic information about the local police system and legal system. When informed of how any investigation is progressing we can pass on any details. Consular staff in London are available to meet family representatives, and they can contact the next of kin if the investigating authorities tell us about any new developments. But in some countries, the investigating authorities and the courts refuse to answer enquiries from third parties, including British consular staff. In these circumstances it is very important to consider appointing a local lawyer. As with funeral directors, we can also provide lists of local lawyers and interpreters.

### **We cannot**

- > investigate deaths ourselves
- > give legal advice
- > pay burial or cremation expenses
- > pay for the return of bodies to the UK
- > pay any debts that may be outstanding or pay any other expenses.

## **General help and advice**

The emotions you may experience after a major personal crisis such as the death of a relative or friend can be traumatic. It is important to remember that help is available. Some people will not want or feel the need to talk to anyone outside their family and friends, but for others it may be essential. There is nothing wrong with knowing that you need help.

**You can find help and advice on bereavement from your family doctor or a number of organisations, such as**

**The Compassionate Friends**

53 North Street  
Bristol BS3 1EN  
Tel: 0845 123 2304  
Email: [helpline@tcf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@tcf.org.uk)  
**[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)**

**Cruse Bereavement Care**

PO Box 800  
Richmond  
Surrey TW9 1RG  
Tel: 0844 477 9400  
Email: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)  
**[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)**

**Samaritans**

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK  
Chris, PO Box 9090  
Stirling, FK8 2SA  
Tel: 08457 90 90 90  
**[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**

**Sudden Death**

PO Box 548,  
Huddersfield HD1 2XZ  
**[www.suddendeath.org.uk](http://www.suddendeath.org.uk)**

**Support After Murder and Manslaughter**

(SAMM) Abroad  
Tel: 0845 123 2384  
Email: [info@sammabroad.org](mailto:info@sammabroad.org)  
**[www.sammabroad.org](http://www.sammabroad.org)**

**Victim Support**

Cranmer House

39 Brixton Road

London SW9 6DZ

Supportline: 0845 30 30 900

**[www.victimsupport.com](http://www.victimsupport.com)**

If you think there has been inappropriate press comments or interest, you may wish to contact:

**Press Complaints Commission**

Halton House

20/23 Holborn

London EC1N 2JD

Tel: 020 7831 0022

Email: [complaints@pcc.org.uk](mailto:complaints@pcc.org.uk)

**[www.pcc.org.uk](http://www.pcc.org.uk)**



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# Tell us what you think

## Giving us feedback

**We welcome your views on the support we provide.** They will help us to identify what we do well and what we could do better. Visit **[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/research](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/research)** for our customer satisfaction survey, or ask your local Embassy or Consulate for a copy. Information about our official complaints procedure is also on this website.

If you prefer to contact us directly our contact details are:

### Consular Directorate

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**Tel:** +44 (0)20 7008 1500



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