
Regional Forensic Centers

West Tennessee Regional Forensic Center

637 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, TN 38105
Phone (901) 222-4600
www.uthsc.edu/forensic-center

Forensic Medical Management Services

850 R S Gass Blvd
Nashville, TN 37216
Phone (615) 743-1800
Fax (615) 743-1890
www.forensicmed.com

Hamilton County Forensic Center

3202 Amnicola Highway
Chattanooga, TN 37406
Phone (423) 493-5175
Fax (423) 493-5176
www.hamiltontn.gov/medicalexaminer.aspx

Knox County Regional Forensic Center

2761 Sullins Street
Knoxville, TN 37919
Phone (865) 215-8000
Fax (865) 215-8001
www.knoxcounty.org/rfc

William L. Jenkins Forensic Center

Box 70425
Johnson City, TN 37614
Phone (423) 439-8038
Fax (423) 439-8070
<https://www.etsu.edu/com/pathology/forensic-center/>

Other Resources

Grief Support

Hospice Foundation of America
<https://hospicefoundation.org/>

What's Your Grief?
<http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/>

Death of a Child

First Candle
<https://firstcandle.org/surviving-the-sudden-death-of-a-baby/>

Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood
<http://sudc.org>

Suicide

Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network
<http://tspn.org/resources/suicide-loss>

Drug-Related Death

GRASP
<http://grasphelp.org/>

Survivors of Crime

Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund
<https://treasury.tn.gov/Services/Claims-and-Risk-Management/Criminal-Injuries-Compensation>

National Center for Victims of Crime
<http://victimsofcrime.org/home>



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The Tennessee Medical Examiner System

Tennessee Department of Health
Office of the State Chief Medical
Examiner
<https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/oscme>

Health.OSCME@tn.gov

Records requests: (615) 837-5039
Johnson City Office: (423) 439-8403

The Tennessee Medical Examiner System

Each of the 95 counties in Tennessee has a county medical examiner. The county medical examiner is a medical doctor who is responsible for the investigation of deaths which occur suddenly and unexpectedly in people in otherwise good health.

The county medical examiner also investigates deaths due or related to any type of trauma, no matter how long has passed between the time of injury and death, possible or confirmed drug overdoses, suspicious or unnatural deaths, and deaths of prisoners or people in state custody.

The office of the state chief medical examiner is based in Nashville with a satellite office in Johnson City. The state chief medical examiner acts as a resource for support and training of county medical examiners and their investigators and is responsible for keeping records of death investigations performed across the state.

Death Investigations

Many county medical examiners have medicolegal death investigators who respond to death scenes and perform investigations. Frequently, medicolegal death investigators are emergency medical technicians or paramedics with specialized training.

The county medical examiner or death investigator will use information obtained from family members or friends of the deceased, law enforcement, and the death scene to determine whether the death falls under medical examiner jurisdiction. If the county medical examiner or death investigator concludes that an autopsy is warranted in order to determine cause and manner of death, the body will be transported to one of the five regional forensic centers listed on this pamphlet for the examination.

Autopsies

The autopsy consists of the external and internal examination of a body. In Tennessee, all autopsies referred to a regional forensic center are performed by forensic pathologists. A forensic pathologist is a specially trained medical doctor who uses findings from the examination of the body and laboratory testing in combination with information obtained from outside sources, such as law enforcement and medical records, to determine cause and manner of death.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will we be able to have an open-casket ceremony after an autopsy is performed?

Yes. The performance of a forensic autopsy should not disfigure the body and should not delay funeral arrangements in the majority of cases.

Who can request a forensic autopsy?

County medical examiners and their investigators, district attorneys, and the state chief medical examiner may order a forensic autopsy.

What happens if the family objects to an autopsy?

The medical examiner has the authority under Tennessee law to order an autopsy. If the family has objections to an autopsy, the legal next-of-kin may discuss them with the Regional Forensic Center where the body has been taken .

Who is considered the next-of-kin?

If a person is married at the time of their death, their spouse is the legal next-of-kin. This is true even if the spouse has been estranged. If there is no spouse, the order of succession is: adult child, parent, adult siblings, adult grandchildren, and grandparents.

May I view the body at the Regional Forensic Center?

No. The Regional Forensic Centers do not allow viewing of the body. Arrangements for viewing should be made at the funeral home chosen by the next-of-kin.

Will the family be billed for a forensic autopsy?

No. Forensic autopsies are paid for by the state and the county ordering the investigation.

How do I get a copy of the autopsy report?

Copies of the autopsy report are available through The Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner at (615) 837-5039 or at www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/oscme. Autopsy reports are also available from the Regional Forensic Center in which the autopsy was performed.

Autopsy reports are considered a matter of public record in Tennessee. If questions arise about information in the autopsy report, the forensic pathologist who performed the autopsy at the Regional Forensic Center should be contacted.

How do I get a copy of the death certificate?

Death certificates can be requested through the Tennessee Office of Vital Records at (615) 741-1763 or at www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/vital-records. The office of Vital Records in the county in which the death occurred can also issue a certified death certificate. Neither the Regional Forensic Centers nor the Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner issues death certificates.