

General Timeline for Post-death Care and Arrangements

Please note: Links in this PDF appear as underlined green text, just as on [CINDEA's](#) website. [In some cases, the name of a section of a webpage or a PDF appears in green but not underlined; these are not actual links.] If you are having difficulty making the links work, click on the Hand icon (which looks like a cartoon outline of a person's hand) in your PDF reader. The Hand icon can be found on the toolbar that begins with an yellow-orange file-folder icon at the top of your screen, just below the menu bar.

Well in Advance of the Death

- Check if ***burials on family/private property*** are allowed in your county or region; and if so, ensure that all required permits and conditions are fulfilled. Where permitted, regulations usually require a burial to be at least 4.5 to 5 feet deep. In Canada, it is usually only in rural areas that private burial is permitted: and you will need to check with your local county/municipal-area office, your MLA or MPP, or a lawyer to find out if this is possible in your locale.
- The ***Notification of Expected Death in the Home*** form (which may be called something different in your province/territory) can often be completed by a physician. If this document exists, then it is not required that a medical person be immediately called into the home to formally pronounce death.
- Make sure that ***all personal documents and information*** are readily available, as these will be needed for the final arrangements, the Death Certificate, and dealing with the will/estate. These documents may include Advance Directives/Expressed Wishes, Representation/Health Proxy Agreements, Power of Attorney, Will (see our [Advance-Care Planning](#) page); and a clear list of information about the Death Journeyer's affairs, such as assets, pensions, next-of-kin, etc.
- Find out which Funeral Homes are willing to provide '***a la carte***' services, such as transportation of the body, if you think this might be needed. [see Resources in Canada Post-death page — [Post-death care information](#) (legal information and regulations re filing documents, etc.)]
- Check the ***width of the doorways and adjoining hallways*** in your home, to ensure that whatever coffin you get will fit through them.
- ***Arrange for a coffin or shroud*** — making sure that it is the right size for the Death Journeyer, and record its measurements (for checking ease of movement into and around the home). If you choose a cardboard/pressboard coffin and plan to decorate it, paint it with primer and/or the background colour in preparation for the decorating.
- Make initial ***arrangements for burial or cremation***, and funeral/memorial services. We advise that you visit the cemetery or crematorium, so that you have a visual memory of what is available before you make the final arrangements. [Note: many cemeteries and crematoriums have a chapel that can be used for the ceremony — sometimes for free — which you might wish to use for the service, especially if there would be more people attending than a private home would allow for.]
- It is wise to start ***writing an obituary*** before an expected death, so that you are able to give considered time to it, and so that the Death Journeyer can have input into it if they wish — although it will need to be finalized after the death (for date of death, date/place of funeral or memorial service, etc.).

Just Before the Death

- A **Permit to Transport the Body** may be required to move the body from home to the cemetery or crematorium, or from the institution where the death took place to the home. A rented or family/friend's car is sufficient, as long as it is able to carry the body laid out flat (station wagon or van). If required in your province/territory, the permit will be available from your local Vital Statistics, or Business Practices and Consumer Protection Authority offices (check [CINDEA's Post-death care information](#) for links to offices in your province/territory).
- **Gather supplies** to care for the body post-death — including ensuring that you have a readily-available source for dry ice (see the [Post-Death Physical Care PDF](#) on our [Post-Death Care](#) page) Whether or not you are following a specific tradition in releasing the soul, it is wise to gather whatever readings, chants or other implements (candles, etc.) will be used in advance, so that they are readily available at the time of death.
- You might want to *rent a coffin* (possibly placing the to-be-decorated-later cardboard coffin in it) for ease of transporting the body (from hospital/hospice/residential facility, or around home) or the time of 'lying-in' at home. Check with your local Funeral Homes to see if this is possible.

Immediately after Death

- **Do nothing but be present.** Say your 'final farewells', etc., or do any traditional ceremonies that guide the soul out of the body (selected readings, prayers, chants, etc.). [Note: in most religious or ethnic traditions, this period immediately after death is considered a sacred time.]
- **Do NOT phone 911, paramedics, or the physician** (for at least one hour) — unless something unexpected has happened (in which case a coroner may need to be involved).
- **Start cooling the body** by opening the windows, or setting up a fan. You can turn up air conditioning, but not too high — be aware both that it may become too cold for visitors, and that you will also speed up the time that rigor mortis sets in (which would interfere with washing/dressing the body).
- **Record the approximate time of death** for the Death Certificate and other records. Do not trust your memory here — because at this time of intense emotion, memory may not be as reliable as it usually is.
- Begin whatever post-death **vigil or soul care** is appropriate (with attention to the need to wash the body before rigor mortis sets in).

Within the first few hours

- Arrange for a physician or registered nurse to complete the **Medical Certificate of Death** (this may be called something different in your province/territory), which will be required by Vital Statistics (for the formal Death Certificate) and for burial/cremation.
- If there is no *Notification of Expected Death in the Home* form, and the Death Journeyer is not registered with a hospice society, **call the physician or coroner** within about 2 hours — the details of what is required may be somewhat different in each province/territory (your local hospice society should be able to clarify what is required).
- In your province/territory, you may be required to complete a **Registration of Death** (may be called something else in your area) and file it with Vital Statistics. [Note: because our culture is used to having a funeral home formally deal with things — such as Registration of Death — you will need to clarify to your Vital Statistics office that you are not using one and ask for the forms that the funeral home would usually address. Ask for a supervisor at the Vital Statistics office, or someone who knows the law regarding not using the assistance of a funeral home.]

- If you are moving the body from a hospital, hospice or residential-care facility, you may be required to have a **Permit to Transport the Body** in hand. You will definitely need to have a **Permit for Burial or Cremation** available (free from your Vital Statistics office, once submitting a Registration of Death and/or request for Death Certificate).
- **Wash and dress the body** before rigor mortis sets in. [Note: some Death Journeymen may wish to return to the ground as they were born — if so, leave the body naked and cover it with a sheet.] See the [Post-Death Physical Care PDF](#), also on our [Post-Death Care](#) page. For further clarification, we recommend the webpage [Special Circumstances in Home Care of the Body](#).
- **Further cool the body** using dry ice. Treatment and placement of dry ice is clarified in the [Post-Death Physical Care](#) and [Using Dry Ice and Gel Packs](#) PDFs on our [Post-Death Care](#) page. [Note: because dry ice dissipates, you will not want to buy it until the death has actually occurred — although it is wise to ensure a source for it beforehand.]

Within the first day or two

- Complete the **Registration/Statement of Death** (within 48 hours after death) — available from Vital Statistics.
- File both the **Medical Certificate of Death and Registration/Statement of Death** with your local Vital Statistics office — this may need to be done earlier if you are transferring the body from an institution (hospital, hospice unit/house, or residential care). [Note: not all provinces/territories have a formal Registration/Statement of Death form — you should be able to find information on how to register the death from your local Vital Statistics office.]
- Finalize an **obituary**. [Note: as obituaries are expensive, you might prefer to use an on-line memorial service. However, they do not serve exactly the same purpose as an obituary, as they are not accessible through the obituary section of the newspaper, where most people check for friends who have died. You can consider paying for a short obituary that includes the URL for an on-line memorial page. Many newspapers now offer an on-line guestbook — for free or a small extra charge — when an obituary is placed in their paper. However, there are also lots of non-newspaper-affiliated free ones available on the web. See a list of some at our Resources in Canada — Post-death page under [On-line Memorials](#).]
- Obtain a **Permit for Burial or Cremation** from your local Vital Statistics office (which is free in most provinces, after both the Medical Certificate of Death, and possibly a Registration of Death, are filed). [Note: cremation can only happen after a waiting period — usually 48 hours after the death.]
- Obtain a **Permit to Transport the Body** from your local Consumer Protection office, if one is required in your province/territory (it may be on-line on your province/territory's website — however, not all provinces require one).
- Send out a **notification of death** to all of the Death Journeyer's family and friends, and any communities/organizations that they were part of. This can usually be done through e-mail (and making use of the Death Journeyer's e-mail address book) — although many will hear about the death and any memorial service through the obituary. If an on-line memorial/guest book is being used, include its URL in the notification as well as in the obituary.
- Arrange for **visitation** (wake, lying-in) for family and close friends.
- Begin **customizing the coffin** — especially if a cardboard/pressboard coffin is used, it can be painted with meaningful symbols and sayings. [Note: if a Green Burial has been chosen, check with the cemetery as to which kind of paints and other decorations can be used — usually only biodegradable materials.]
- Make **final arrangements for the burial/cremation**, as well as any graveside or cremation-witnessing ceremony.

Within 3 - 4 days (or just before the burial/cremation)

- Unless the body is to remain unclothed, you may want to ***dress your loved one*** with the final clothes that they will be buried or cremated in (i.e., after rigor mortis has passed). If the Death Journeyer chose a shroud, now is the time to shroud the body (see information on 'shrouding the body' in our [Post-Death Physical Care PDF](#) on the [Post-Death Care](#) page).
- ***Review your wishes*** with the cemetery or crematorium staff to ensure that there are no complications with your wishes for the graveside or cremation ceremony.
- Just before burial or cremation, you may wish to also hold a ***special farewell ceremony*** at home for close family and friends, with the body present (a home version of an open-coffin visitation or funeral).
- Set a date for a ***memorial service*** (if chosen), and perhaps include the date in the obituary. [Note: memorial services are usually held some time after the death — a week to several months, depending on the family's need. Family and friends may be travelling from a distance to attend. As well, the Death Journeyer's caregivers usually need time to process the death, take a break from the post-death care and burial/cremation service, and attend to estate issues — as well as their own lives.]

Within the next week to 10 days

- Make sure that there are enough ***copies of the Death Certificate*** (formally certified or photocopies) for the Death Journeyer's executor to handle the estate. [Note: you will need a separate copy for each bank account, property holding, pension, etc. Check with Vital Statistics or your Pan-Death Provider as to which ones have to be formally certified, and which ones can be photocopies.]
- Begin ***preparing for the memorial service*** (location, notification, the ceremony itself, etc.).
- If the executor is not a paid professional, begin ***dealing with the will***, and any actions required by it — transfer or sale of house, distribution of personal items, etc.
- Consider ***grief counselling*** (though probably for a later date) — listings of individual practitioners or support groups are available through your local Hospice Society, any seniors' or family-care organizations, or on our listings for [Grief/Bereavement Counselling](#).

Please feel free to contact us at contact@cindea.ca if you have any questions,
OR if you find out any relevant information (not already on our site)
about your province/territory or municipality.

Notes: