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Commonwealth  
Office

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## Bereavement in China

Prepared by British Embassy and Consulates-General in China

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

The following information has been prepared by the British Embassy and Consulates-General in China for the convenience of British nationals who may require advice and assistance in the event of a death in China. It is provided on the understanding that we (the British Embassy and Consulates General in China) do not assume or undertake any legal responsibility, to you, or those affected, if you choose to take any form of action on the basis of this information.

Further and alternatively, we cannot accept any liability to any person or company for any financial loss or damage arising from the use of this information or from any failure to give information.

Our aim is to provide British nationals with relevant information to enable them to make better informed decisions, but our lists are **not recommendations and should not be treated as such.**

# Contents

Introduction

Contacts for consular support

What we can do to help

What we cannot do

What you can do

Information on procedures following a death

- Decision-making process
- Identifying the person who died
- Death certificate
- Registration
- Autopsy (post-mortem)
- Cancellation of British passport and Chinese visa
- Disposal of the deceased's remains
- Repatriation
- Return of personal effects
- Insurance
- Transfer of funds
- Tell Us Once

Legal aid

Media handling

Other useful contacts

Appendix - letter of authorisation

# Introduction

The death of a relative or friend is always distressing, but if it happens overseas the distress can be made worse by practical problems. An already traumatic experience may be exacerbated due to unfamiliarity with procedures in foreign countries, or the existence of a language barrier.

The Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) including the British Embassy and Consulates-General are ready to help.

The Bereavement in China information pack is intended to explain what practical support British consular staff can offer you, and what you need to do yourself.

Up-to-date information is also available on the gov.uk website, at the following address:

[www.gov.uk/after-a-death/overview](http://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/overview)

Information specific to death overseas can be found under section 8, "Death abroad" of the above link, as well as in the guides located at this address:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/coping-with-death-abroad](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coping-with-death-abroad)

# Contacts for consular support

Calling from within mainland China, the contact details below should be used:

<p><b>The Consular Section of the British Embassy Beijing</b></p> <p>21st Floor North Tower, Kerry Centre, No.1 Guanghua Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing, 100020, China</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)10 8529 6600</p> <p><a href="mailto:consular.beijing@fco.gov.uk">consular.beijing@fco.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>The Consular Section of the British Consulate- General Chongqing</b></p> <p>Suite 2801, Metropolitan Oriental Plaza, 68 Zourong Road, Yu Zhong District, Chongqing, 400010, China</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)23 6369 1500</p> <p><a href="mailto:consular.chongqing@fco.gov.uk">consular.chongqing@fco.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>The Consular Section of the British Consulate- General Guangzhou</b></p> <p>22/F Guangzhou International Finance Centre, 5 Zhujiang Road West, Zhujiang New Town, Guangzhou, 510623, China</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)20 8314 3000</p> <p><a href="mailto:consular.guangzhou@fco.gov.uk">consular.guangzhou@fco.gov.uk</a></p>	<p><b>The Consular Section of the British Consulate- General Shanghai</b></p> <p>17F, British Centre, Garden Square, 968 West Beijing Road, Shanghai, 200041, China</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)21 3279 2000</p> <p><a href="mailto:consular.shanghai@fco.gov.uk">consular.shanghai@fco.gov.uk</a></p>

If calling from within the UK, please contact the Consular Directorate at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office in London:

Tel: +44 (0)20 7008 1500

If calling out of hours, you can contact the **Global Response Centre** 24/7 from anywhere in the world:

Tel: +44 (0)20 7008 1500 and ask for the Global Response Centre

The Global Response Centre (GRC) provides 24/7 capability for the FCO. The GRC is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, maintaining a professional out-of-hours service to the public, Ministers, senior officials and the FCO network.

## What we can do to help

- keep the next of kin informed, and try to ensure you don't feel that you are on your own
- offer advice on local procedures<sup>1</sup> (e.g. local cremation or repatriation of remains)
- provide a list of local and international funeral directors
- advise you on how to apply to register the death with the UK authorities<sup>2</sup>
- advise you on how to transfer money from friends and relatives in the UK or another third country to pay any necessary costs
- draft a letter to the relevant Chinese immigration authorities, requesting that the visa applications of immediate family members wishing to travel to China be fast-tracked<sup>3</sup>

Note 1: It is not possible to arrange a local burial in China. Cremation is the only local option available, or repatriation of full remains or ashes to the UK.

Note 2: There is no obligation to apply to register the death with the UK authorities. You don't have to do this, but it means the death will be recorded with the General Register Offices (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the National Records Office of Scotland and you can obtain a UK-style death certificate in English. Local death certificates are in Chinese only.

Note 3: Please note that we cannot make any guarantees regarding visa applications to China or the UK.

## What we cannot do

- investigate an alleged crime
- pay hospital bills
- pay cremation or repatriation costs
- pay any outstanding debts
- offer legal advice
- store or send back to the UK the deceased's personal effects
- negotiate with insurance companies

## What you can do

- provide us with as much information as possible about the deceased:
  - full name
  - date of birth
  - place of birth
  - a copy of their birth certificate
  - address
  - passport number
  - a copy of their passport
  - where and when their passport was issued
  - details of their next of kin (if someone other than yourself)
- contact the deceased's insurance company
- obtain a local death certificate from the hospital or local Public Security Bureau
- obtain certified copies of the death certificate from a local Notary Public
- produce relevant documents which prove relationship with the deceased, such as marriage or birth certificates
- make copies of the deceased's passport details page for future use

## Information on procedures following a death

The following information is intended to provide clarity regarding procedures to be taken following the death of a loved one or friend in China. Details are not intended to be exhaustive, and are subject to change.

Up-to-date information is also available on the gov.uk website, at the following address:

[www.gov.uk/after-a-death/overview](http://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/overview)

Information specific to death overseas can be found under section 8, "Death abroad".

### Decision-making process

If the next of kin is in China, they may make decisions on issues such as whether the deceased should be repatriated or cremated, and collect documents such as the death certificate themselves.

If the next of kin is not in China, and does not intend to travel to China, a letter should be written explicitly stating their wishes regarding how their loved one should be treated. The letter should also provide relevant information such as whether they would like an autopsy to be conducted in China.

To entrust collection of documents to someone other than the next of kin, a **letter of authorisation** should be written by the next of kin themselves.

The letter should contain the name, relation, and passport number of the next of kin, as well as the name and passport number (or Chinese ID number) of the person entrusted to collect the documents. The letter should be signed by the next of kin, and a photocopy of the details page of their passport should accompany it.

Typically the proxy would be another family member, friend, or representative of the insurance company or funeral director. If there is no one suitable available to act as proxy, consular staff may fulfil this role.

A copy of the letter should be provided to the relevant British Embassy or Consulate General. Consular staff will then pass this letter to the relevant authorities in an official note.

See the **appendix** for an example letter of authorisation.

## Identifying the person who died

After someone has died, they are usually taken to a mortuary, where they will need to be identified. If the person who died was travelling with a friend or relative, they may be asked to do this. Otherwise, the local authorities or a consular official may do it.

Depending on the circumstances, you may have seen the person after death. If not, you may wish to travel to China to view them. Consular staff will be able to offer some guidance, and may accompany you to the mortuary if requested.

## Death certificate

It is vital that an official death certificate be obtained. The local death certificate issued in China will be accepted in the UK, though you may need to obtain a certified translation of the document. This can be done by a local Notary Public or translator. Ask a consular officer to provide you with our list of lawyers and translators in China, or download the lists yourself from:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/china-list-of-lawyers](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/china-list-of-lawyers)

If a British national passes away in hospital in China, the hospital will issue a Chinese-language death certificate. It is important that the death certificate specifies the cause of death, and that the death was not caused by infectious diseases. If death was caused by injuries of unknown specification, it may be necessary to obtain clearance from the Public Security Bureau.

If a British national passes away somewhere other than a hospital, the local Public Security Bureau must be notified to establish the cause of death. Forensic staff may be called on-site to conduct an investigation. If the cause of death cannot be quickly identified, but police are satisfied the death is not the result of violence, they may issue a police death certificate giving “sudden death” as the cause of death.

Police in China reserve the right to request an autopsy if a death occurs under suspicious circumstances. If an autopsy is requested, the next of kin will need to give approval (either directly or via proxy – for more details see the next section, “Autopsy (post-mortem)”) before a death certificate may be issued by the local Public Security Bureau.

Hospitals may withhold death certificates before medicals bills are settled.

In Shanghai, a police certificate is required in all circumstances prior to any funeral arrangements being made.



## Registration

You can also apply to register the death with the UK authorities. You don't have to do this, but it means the death will be recorded with the General Register Office (England, Wales & Northern Ireland) or the National Records Office (Scotland), and that you can order a consular death registration certificate.

Please visit this address for further details:

[www.gov.uk/register-a-death/y/overseas](http://www.gov.uk/register-a-death/y/overseas)

## Autopsy (post-mortem)

Autopsies (also known as post-mortems) are not carried out as a matter of course in China. If next of kin would like further information related to the death of their loved one, or have reason to believe the circumstances of death are suspicious, they may request an autopsy be conducted.

There is usually a charge for conducting autopsies, prices for which vary widely between provinces. Additionally, autopsy reports are issued in Chinese. If it is necessary to obtain a translation, the insurance company may be able to do this; in the absence of insurance, the next of kin should pay for this personally. See the section "Death certificate" for information on obtaining translations.

In conducting autopsies, common practice is that only small sections of organs are removed from the deceased. Organs are not typically removed in their entirety, or retained.

Please note that in some cases the process of conducting an autopsy in China has been known to go on for a significant period of time, in some instances for longer than 1 month. During this time the body will not be released for repatriation or other purposes.

Police in China reserve the right to request an autopsy if a death occurs under suspicious circumstances. If an autopsy is requested, the next of kin will need to give approval. If the next of kin is in China, they can provide authority directly. Otherwise, they may make a request via the British Embassy or Consulates-General.

## **Cancellation of British passport and Chinese visa**

It is important that the British passport of the deceased is cancelled, in order to prevent fraudulent use. For information on how to do so, please consult information at the address below. There is a short form to complete which needs to be sent to HM Passport Office along with the passport to be cancelled.

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-to-do-with-a-passport-when-the-passport-holder-has-died](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-to-do-with-a-passport-when-the-passport-holder-has-died)

The Chinese visa of the deceased should be cancelled with the Exit & Entry Division of the Public Security Bureau (PSB), the department responsible for immigration. Doing so will ensure the remains may be released for repatriation to the UK.

If the next of kin is in China, they can act to cancel the valid Chinese visa of the deceased via the PSB. Consular staff can provide the details of the relevant PSB office.

If the next of kin is not in China, consular staff may arrange for cancellation of the visa.

## **Disposal of the deceased's remains**

The next of kin should make a decision on whether the deceased should be cremated or repatriated for burial. Burials cannot be performed in China. The options available are as follows:

- cremation for local disposal in China
- repatriation of the full remains for burial or cremation in the UK (or another country)
- repatriation of the ashes, following cremation in China

The latter option may be useful if the next of kin wishes their loved one to be returned to the UK, but due to lack of insurance coverage is unable to pay the higher expense.

**If the religious beliefs of the deceased entail a need for the remains to be handled in a specific manner, please inform the funeral director or consular staff as soon as possible.**

## Repatriation

Funeral directors will be able to arrange repatriation of the deceased's remains or ashes, once necessary documents such as the death certificate have been provided. You may select a funeral director yourself, or the insurance company may assign one. Please check with the insurer first, as they may have a list of preferred service providers.

Consular staff can provide you with a list of local and international funeral directors, or you can download the list from gov.uk:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-funeral-directors-in-china](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-funeral-directors-in-china)

It may be possible to employ a UK-based funeral director of your own choice, if they offer international repatriation services.

Embalming is required if the deceased's body is to be repatriated. This will be arranged by the funeral director, who will produce an embalming certificate for immigration purposes.

**If the religious beliefs of the deceased entail a need for the embalming to be conducted in a specific manner, please inform the funeral director or consular staff as soon as possible.**

In the case of repatriating the ashes of the deceased, it may be possible to obtain a certificate from certain airlines allowing the ashes to be carried onboard. It is advisable to receive confirmation from any particular airline in advance, if deciding to choose this option.

In the absence of insurance, repatriation can be an expensive procedure. Funeral directors vary, but in recent instances repatriation of full remains typically costs between 70,000-120,000 Chinese Yuan (roughly equivalent to £7,000-12,000). This figure is subject to change, provided only to offer guidance in the decision-making process.

## Return of personal effects

In general, the funeral director assigned responsibility for repatriation of the deceased will not deal with personal belongings, though there may be exceptions. The British Embassy and Consulates General cannot receive or administer personal belongings.

It may be possible for an insurance company to process possessions. Alternatively, the next of kin may provide a letter of authorisation for a third party to handle belongings.

Please note that there are certain items which couriers are unable to transport, including but not limited to: cash, credit cards, mechanical watches, items containing strong magnets or batteries, explosive or dangerous items.

## **Insurers**

If the deceased has insurance, you should make contact with the insurance company as soon as possible. The insurer may be able to assist in much of the necessary arrangements, cover the costs of these arrangements, and provide trusted service providers such as funeral directors.

It may be possible to appoint an insurance company representative with authorisation to perform tasks such as collection of the death certificate, if the next of kin is not able to do so themselves. If the next of kin wishes to do this, it is advised to notify the insurer and consular staff as soon as possible, to reduce any potential delays in obtaining authorisation.

Consular staff may be able to assist you in liaising with the insurance company. However, please note that the British Embassies and Consulates-General cannot negotiate with insurance companies. In the absence of suitable insurance, the next of kin is expected to cover the cost of any expenses incurred.

## **Transfer of funds**

In the event that it is necessary for the next of kin to send funds to China, for example if the deceased is uninsured and payment is required for medical or repatriation fees, payment should be made directly to the recipient (e.g. a hospital or funeral director).

Family and friends anywhere in the world can transfer money via commercial money transfer companies, for example, Western Union, MoneyGram, Travelex, American Express, Post Office or banks.

## Tell Us Once

Tell Us Once is a service that lets you report a death to most government organisations in one go.

Tell Us Once will notify:

- HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) – to deal with tax and cancel benefits
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) – to cancel benefits, e.g. income support
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) – to cancel a driving licence
- Passport Office – to cancel a passport<sup>4</sup>
- the local council – to cancel housing benefit, council tax benefit, a Blue Badge, inform council housing services and remove the deceased from the electoral register

Information on the Tell Us Once service can be found here:

[www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once](http://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once)

Note 4: Passports will normally be cancelled by consular officers prior to repatriation of the deceased.

## Legal aid

If you require legal assistance within China, you may consult our list of lawyers:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/china-list-of-lawyers](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/china-list-of-lawyers)

Please note that the FCO including consular staff are not able to provide recommendations regarding any particular service provider. Inclusion in this list should not be taken as approval by the FCO of any particular legal service provider.

## Media handling

Neither the British Embassy & Consulates General, nor any other aspect of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, will release information on a deceased British national to the press, unless specifically asked to do so by the next of kin.

Some deaths (especially those which occur under unusual circumstances or as a result of accidents or murders) may attract media attention. If you are contacted by media representatives and are not willing, or able, to deal with them yourself, you should ask them to contact either the Press & Public Affairs Office of the British Embassy Beijing (11 Guang Hua Road, tel: +86 (0)10 5192 4000), or the Foreign & Commonwealth Office in London (tel: +44 (0)20 7270 1500). Both of these offices have fully trained staff with experience of dealing with the media.

You should avoid speaking to the media in any context if the next of kin has not yet been informed of the death. This includes questions over the validity or falsity of rumours, and the personal details of any involved in the incident.

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

### **Press Complaints Commission**

Halton House

20/23 Holborn

London EC1N 2JD

Tel: +44 (0)20 7831 0022

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

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

## Other useful contacts

The following contacts may be able to provide support to you during times of bereavement, or assist in carrying out necessary arrangements following a death. Please note that inclusion in this list is strictly for information purposes, and is by no means an endorsement or guarantee of the quality of their services.

### In the UK

- your family doctor
- your local Social Services
- The Bereavement Register: +44 (0)870 600 7222  
[www.the-bereavement-register.org.uk](http://www.the-bereavement-register.org.uk)
- British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy: +44 (0)870 443 5252  
[www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)
- Child Bereavement Charity: +44 (0)14 9444 6648  
[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)
- Citizens Advice Bureau: +44 (0)20 7833 2181  
[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)
- The Compassionate Friends: +44 (0)845 123 2304  
[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)
- Cruse Bereavement Care: +44 (0)844 477 9400  
[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)
- Inquest: +44 (0)20 7263 1111  
[www.inquest.org.uk](http://www.inquest.org.uk)
- Samaritans: +44 (0)8457 90 90 90  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- Sudden Death: +44 (0)845 123 2384  
[www.suddendeath.org.uk](http://www.suddendeath.org.uk)
- Support After Murder and Manslaughter: +44 (0)845 123 2384  
[www.sammabroad.org](http://www.sammabroad.org)
- Victim Support: +44 (0)845 30 30 900  
[www.victimsupport.com](http://www.victimsupport.com)

## Visa to travel to China

If the next of kin or other immediate family members wish to travel to China, a Chinese visa will be required. If needed, consular staff may provide an official letter requesting that the application be fast-tracked.

However, please be aware that we are limited to being able to submit a request on compassionate grounds, and cannot make guarantees related to visa issuance or timeframes.

<p><b>Chinese Embassy London</b></p> <p>31 Portland Place, London, W1B 1QD</p> <p>Tel: +44 (0)20 7631 1430</p> <p>Nearest tube station: Great Portland Street (Hammersmith &amp; City, Circle and Metropolitan lines), Regent's Street (Bakerloo line)</p> <p><a href="http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk">www.chinese-embassy.org.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Chinese Visa Application Centre - London</b></p> <p>12 Old Jewry, London, EC2R 8DU</p> <p>Tel: +44 (0)20 7776 78888 Fax: +44 (0)20 7710 6001 Email: <a href="mailto:ukcentre@visaforchina.org">ukcentre@visaforchina.org</a></p> <p>Nearest tube station: Bank Station (Central &amp; DLR lines) Nearest train station: Cannon Street Railway Station Bus route: 8, 23, 25 (Bank Station Bus Stop)</p> <p><a href="http://www.visaforchina.org">www.visaforchina.org</a></p>
<p><b>Chinese Visa Application Centre - Edinburgh</b></p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Exchange Tower, 19 Canning Street, Edinburgh, EH3 8EG</p> <p><a href="http://www.visaforchina.org/EDI_EN/">www.visaforchina.org/EDI_EN/</a></p>	<p><b>Chinese Visa Application Centre - Manchester</b></p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 75 Mosley Street, Manchester, M2 3HR</p> <p><a href="http://www.visaforchina.org/MAN_EN/">www.visaforchina.org/MAN_EN/</a></p>
<p><b>Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Hong Kong (Chinese visa service)</b></p> <p>7/F, Lower Block, China Resources Building, 26 Harbour Road, Won Chai, Hong Kong</p> <p>Nearest tube station: Wan Chai (Island Line)</p> <p>Tel: +85 (0)23 414 2300 / 414 2424</p> <p><a href="http://www.fmcopec.gov.hk/eng/fwxx/wgrqz/">www.fmcopec.gov.hk/eng/fwxx/wgrqz/</a></p>	



## Public Security Bureau (PSB) Entry & Exit Division

The Entry & Exit Division of the PSB is responsible for immigration issues in China, and therefore are the point of contact for visa issues, as well as providing police death certificates where applicable. Regions with large populations of British nationals are listed below, but the list is not exhaustive and others can be made available.

<p><b>Beijing</b></p> <p>2 East Andingmen Road, Dongcheng District, Beijing</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)10 8402 0101 Website: <a href="http://www.bjgaj.gov.cn/jjcrj/index.jsp">www.bjgaj.gov.cn/jjcrj/index.jsp</a> Nearest tube station: Lama Temple (Yong He Gong) (lines 2 &amp; 5)</p>	<p><b>Chongqing Municipality</b></p> <p>555 Huanglong Road, Yubei District, Chongqing 401147</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)23 6369 1916 / 1944 Website: <a href="http://www.cqcrj.gov.cn">www.cqcrj.gov.cn</a> Nearest tube station: Huangnibang (line 6)</p>
<p><b>Guangdong Province</b></p> <p>698 East Dongfeng Road, Yuexiu District, Guangzhou, Guangdong</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)20 8311 1000 Website: <a href="http://www.gdcrj.com/index.htm">www.gdcrj.com/index.htm</a> Nearest tube station: Ouzhuang (lines 5 &amp; 6), Dongshankou (line 1)</p>	<p><b>Guangxi Province</b></p> <p>4 Xi'er Li, Xiuling Road, Nanning, Guangxi</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)771 289 1260 Website: <a href="http://gxcrj.com">http://gxcrj.com</a></p>
<p><b>Shanghai</b></p> <p>3/F, 1500 Minsheng Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)21 2895 1900 Nearest tube station: Changshou Road (line 7)</p>	<p><b>Sichuan Province</b></p> <p>159 Wen Weng Road, Chengdu, Sichuan 610041</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)28 8630 1450 Nearest tube station: Tianfu Guangchang (lines 1 &amp; 2), Renmin Gongyuan (line 2)</p>
<p><b>Tianjin Municipality</b></p> <p>19 Shou'an Street, Hebei District, Tianjin</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)22 2445 8825 Nearest tube station: Jianguodao (line 2)</p>	<p><b>Yunnan Province</b></p> <p>Guangfu Road Middle Section, Xishan District, Kunming, Yunnan</p> <p>Tel: +86 (0)871 6305 4770 Website: <a href="http://www.crjyn.net">www.crjyn.net</a></p>

## Appendix – letter of authorisation

The following is an example of a letter of authorisation, to be used for granting permissions to a third party for duties such as collection of the deceased's death certificate.

30<sup>th</sup> March 2015

To Whom It May Concern

As next of kin, I hereby give permission to a representative of (insurance company's name) to collect John Richard Smith's (British passport number: 123456789) death certificate, and to collect his personal belongings from his apartment. This representative is Zhang Yu (Chinese ID number: XYZ01234).

(signature)

Joanne Smith

British passport number: 987654321