



British Embassy  
Tokyo

## Death/Bereavement Information Sheet in Japan

Prepared by British Embassy Tokyo

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

The death of a relative or a friend can be a traumatic experience. When the death occurs overseas, family and friends in the UK can feel additional distress as they are unfamiliar with foreign procedures and perhaps are unable to communicate in the language of the country where the death occurred. Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our Embassy in Japan are ready to help as far as they can. You may be uncertain about what to do next or who to contact for advice.

These notes are designed to help you through the practical arrangements you will need to make. You should be aware that procedures in Japan differ significantly to those in the United Kingdom and that, while we understand your need for arrangements to be made quickly, this is not always possible.

*The information contained in this document is not meant to be a definitive statement of the law, nor is it to be taken as a substitute for independent legal advice.*

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### **What we can do to help**

- Inform next of kin
- Offer advice on local procedures
- Provide a list of local funeral homes
- Provide information about transferring funds
- Advise how to apply for a UK style death certificate

### **What we cannot do**

- Investigate an alleged crime
- Pay any hospital bills
- Pay funeral (burial, cremation or repatriation) costs
- Pay any outstanding debts
- Offer legal advice
- Store or send back to UK the deceased's personal effects
- Negotiate with insurance companies.

### **General Information and Procedures**

Next of kin or some other responsible person, such as an undertaker, must notify the local ward office of the death. A local certificate is issued promptly on payment of a small fee. The cost will vary depending on the ward office. Usually, the undertaker will pay and recover the cost in his account.

The local death certificate consists of the death certificate itself (“*shibo-shindansho*”: 死亡診断書) and a Notification of Death form (“*Kisai-Jiko-Shomeisho*”: 記載事項証明書).

If the death occurs in a hospital, the certificate is issued in the name of the doctor in charge of the case. The doctor will complete the medical information. A family member, friend or colleague of the person who died will need to fill in the rest of the information required.

For all other deaths, the death certificate will be issued by the local police or, the medical authorities. A family member, friend, colleague or, if necessary, someone unrelated will need to fill in the other necessary information.

If the precise medical cause of death is not shown on the death certificate, (eg. it might state “suspected death through sickness” - “*Byoshi-no-utagai*”: 病死の疑い), one of the following reports may also be required:

- A report issued by the medical examiner's office indicating the presumed cause of death and stating that a post-mortem examination will be made to determine the precise cause of death; or
- Where there is no medical examiner's office, a report on professional headed notepaper by the local doctor responsible.

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The death certificate/notification of death should be presented to the city/ward office where the death occurred. The city/ward office will advise whether one of the above reports is also needed. Once notification has been accepted by the authorities, they will issue a “Certificate of Acceptance of Notification of Death” (“*Shibo-todoke-juri-shomeisho*”: 死亡届受理証明書) and a “Certificate of Permission for Cremation/Burial” (“*Kaso/Maiso-kyokasho*”: 火葬埋葬許可書). These state whether or not the death was caused by an infectious disease and allow for the body to be released for cremation, or for transportation back to the UK (for which some additional documents are needed – see below).

### **Autopsies (Post-mortems)**

In Japan there are two categories of post-mortem:

**Administrative post-mortem** – when the death occurs as a result of an accident or in cases of sudden death by natural causes occurring outside of the hospital or home

**Judicial post-mortem** – where the death occurs in suspicious circumstances.

In both cases, the post-mortem is carried out without the consent of next-of-kin. Once the post-mortem is complete, the body is usually released for cremation or burial. This is the case even when a definitive cause of death has not been established, as samples of organs are typically retained to allow the authorities to continue their tests to establish the exact cause of death (see information on Organ Retention below).

In Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Kobe and Fukuoka post-mortems are carried out by the Medical Examiner’s Office. In other parts of Japan there are no full-time Medical Examiner’s Offices, so post-mortems are carried out at local university hospitals or other medical facilities.

### **Post-mortem Reports**

Post-mortem reports and photographs can be supplied to the Embassy’s Consular Section through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for onward transmission to UK coroners. This can take several months. No separate copies are supplied to the family.

### **Organ Retention**

It is standard practice to take slide samples from organs in order to carry out toxicological and other tests. If these samples indicate evidence of foul play then an organ will be retained. No next of kin permission is sought. If there is no evidence of foul play, organs are not retained. However, slide samples are almost always kept, especially in cases where a definitive cause of death has not been established before the body is released.

### **Repatriation and Burial**

Local burial is not possible in large cities like Tokyo and Osaka, and is very rare in other areas. Instead, cremation is the most common option with over 5000 crematoria in Japan.

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It is possible to arrange for repatriation to the UK, this can be done through local or international funeral directors. Please see below for detailed information about the documents required and how to obtain these. For a selected list of funeral directors in Japan please see the end of this document.

### **Documents required for transportation of a body to the United Kingdom:**

- A certified copy of the Death Certificate/Notification of Death, which includes the medical section completed by a doctor or a medical examiner (“*Kisai-Jiko-Shomeisho*”: 記載事項証明書);
- A certificate of permission for cremation/burial (“*Kaso/Maiso-kyokasho*”: 火葬埋葬許可書);
- An embalming certificate (“*Bofu-shochi-shomeisho*”: 防腐処置証明書) issued by the local undertaker;
- A certificate indicating the specification of the coffin which complies with International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations, issued by the local undertaker;
- A certificate from the local undertaker confirming that the coffin contains the remains (name as given in the certificate) and nothing else.

### **Documents required for transport of ashes to the United Kingdom:**

- A certified copy of the Death Certificate/Notification of Death, which includes the medical section completed by a doctor or a medical examiner (“*Kisai-Jiko-Shomeisho*” 記載事項証明書);
- A certificate of cremation issued by a crematorium authority;
- A certificate issued by a crematorium authority confirming that the urn contains nothing but ashes.

**Note: All bodies repatriated to the United Kingdom are assumed to be infectious, whether or not this is indicated in the accompanying documentation.**

### **Death Registration with the General Register Office:**

You do not have to register a death overseas with the General Register Office (GRO) in the UK. However, by doing so, you can get a UK style death certificate, and a permanent copy of it will always be available to the family. Full details of how to do this are available at <https://www.gov.uk/register-a-death>.

### **Return of Personal Effects**

The personal effects of someone who dies are usually collected by their next of kin, employer or sponsors, who will need to make arrangements to ship these back to the UK if required. The Embassy cannot take possession of someone’s personal effects.

## **Passports**

It is important that the passport of a person who dies is cancelled so that it cannot be used illegally. Please submit the passport and the attached D1 form together with the death certificate. The passport will be returned to you after cancellation if requested.

## **Police/Judicial Inquiries/Deaths in Suspicious circumstances**

The police carry out enquiries into suspicious deaths and deaths resulting from road accidents. Copies of their reports are not normally given to the next of kin. In cases where a suspect is arrested, the suspect will generally be held for up to 23 days while the police and public prosecutor carry out their investigations. Following this, the suspect will either be discharged or indicted. If a suspect is indicted, the subsequent trial process can move very slowly. Trials and any subsequent appeals can sometimes take years to be completed.

## **Legal Aid**

Legal aid is available in some circumstances in Japan and is means tested. It is possible to take on a private lawyer, although this can be expensive. We provide a list of English speaking lawyers in Japan here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/japan-list-of-lawyers>

Free, or inexpensive, legal consultation is available through the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, details of which can be found through the link above.

## **Compensation**

A modest compensation scheme is available, but it applies only to Japanese nationals and foreigners resident in Japan. If the person who dies is a visitor, their nextofkin do not qualify.

Applications for compensation can be made to the Public Safety Committee of the local Prefectural Police Headquarters.

## **SELECTED LIST OF UNDERTAKERS IN THE TOKYO CONSULAR DISRICT:**

1. Airhearse International Inc.  
5-16-18, Higashi-kojiya, Ota-ku, Tokyo 144-0033  
Tel : 03 5735 9509, Fax : 03 5705 9509, Email : [info@airhearse.com](mailto:info@airhearse.com)  
Web: [www.airhearse.com](http://www.airhearse.com)
2. Co. Hakuzensha  
32-1 Shin-minato, Mihama-ku, Chiba 261-0002  
Tel: 0120 444 999, No Email address  
Web: <http://www.hakuzensha.co.jp/>
3. International Mortuary Systems (IMS) Japan, Inc  
5-17-3, 3F, Shiba, Kawaguchi-shi, Saitama-ken 333-0842  
Tel: 048-261-3302, Fax: 048-262-2120

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Web: <https://www.alphaclub.co.jp/>

Email: [Imsj01@alphaclub.co.jp](mailto:Imsj01@alphaclub.co.jp)

4. Santoku Funeral Parlour Co, Ltd  
7-1 Irifune 2-Chome, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0042  
Tel: 03-3551-2047/3019, Fax: 03-3555-1966  
Email: [2NB4A@toccata.plala.or.jp](mailto:2NB4A@toccata.plala.or.jp) Web: [www.santoku.tv/kaigai03.html](http://www.santoku.tv/kaigai03.html)
  
5. Totensha Co., Inc.  
1-19-11, Minami Aoyama, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-0062  
Tel: 03 3478 1444, Fax: 03 3478 1594