

## **INFORMATION SHEET RELATING TO DEATHS IN RUSSIA**

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 Consulates in Russia 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 Russian procedures 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.*

### **Basic information**

We can offer basic information about the local police system and legal system. If required, we can provide lists of local lawyers and interpreters (although we do not pay for either).

In all cases where you, as next of kin, have concerns about the circumstances surrounding the death, we suggest you get professional legal advice. Other information on the consular services' role and the support we can offer when a British national dies overseas can found in our [Guide for Bereaved Families](#).

### **Autopsies (Post Mortems)**

The decision to carry out an autopsy or not is dependent on the circumstances of death and on the wishes of the next of kin.

An autopsy will normally be conducted unless the relatives are against it for moral, religious or any other reasons. However the relatives should be aware that even if they are strongly against autopsy, it may take quite a considerable period of time for the Russian authorities to consider this particular case and there is no guarantee that they would let to repatriate without autopsy performed.

If the deceased person was receiving treatment for cancer or any other disease and the diagnosis had been proved by tests an autopsy may not be conducted. Also an autopsy is not usually conducted if the deceased has a medical history and either local or foreign hospital can prove it.

Post Mortem reports are not usually released to family members. However, next of kin can apply for a special court order to have the results released but there is no guarantee of success. Medical death certificate is normally issued after the cause of death was established and on the basis of it a local death certificate is issued.

## **Organ Retention**

Under Russian law, organ retention and transplantation can only be performed if either the deceased person agreed to become an organ donor whilst still alive or the next of kin gives consent after death. The permission of a hospital's head physician is required for organ retention. If the death requires forensic examination the forensic expert's permission with notification of the prosecutor's office is also necessary.

## **Mortuary Facilities**

Mortuary facilities are available in most Russian cities. The body is usually transported by ambulance to the nearest mortuary. It can be kept there free of charge for three days (if the death took place in hospital), however depending on the mortuary this rule may not be applicable. Additional days will normally be charged to the family of the deceased.

## **Repatriation and Burial**

A local death certificate must be obtained prior to burial. Local burial or cremation (where available) is only possible with the family's consent.

However, it should be noted that if death occurs in suspicious circumstances or as a result of a road traffic accident and the body is released for local burial/cremation it will not be possible for a UK inquest to be carried out.

If the family wishes to repatriate the deceased, the Consular Section of the British Embassy or Consulate-General can provide contact information of an international undertaker. The undertaker prepares all necessary paperwork and permissions in such cases. For reference purposes, lists of International and local Funeral Directors are provided at the end on the document.

## **Registration of the death**

The Russian authorities will issue a death certificate in Russian at a civilian registrar's office. This usually takes up to 3 days. Notarised translation of the deceased person's passport is required. A Russian death certificate does not show details of the cause of death (as is the case in the UK). You may also wish to register the death with UK authorities and receive a British style death certificate. Please refer to <https://www.gov.uk/register-a-death/y/overseas> for more information. (Please note that in a consular death registration certificate does not state the cause of death).

## **Return of Personal Effects**

The personal effects of a deceased person are usually returned to the family unless a certain item or items constitute evidence related to the cause of death. If the cause of death is under investigation, permission from the investigator is needed for the return of personal effects to the family.

## **Police/Judicial Inquiries**

If death occurs at home the next of kin would usually contact a G.P. (or any physician available from a policlinic closest to the place of death). The GP performs an examination of the body to establish a presumed cause of death. If the GP doubts the death is from natural cause the police will be summoned. Based on the GPs report the mortuary issues a medical death certificate, which lists personal details of the next of kin of the deceased. The medical death certificate states cause of death and cannot be amended once issued. After issue, the medical death certificate is exchanged at the local civilian registrar's office for a statutory death certificate.

In cases of suspicious deaths or road traffic accidents an ambulance and the police should be called (an autopsy is always performed). If the case is considered criminal, the investigating police officer takes over any further investigation of the case. As a rule, official police reports are not disclosed to the relatives of the deceased. However, in some cases a special court order can be obtained although in most cases only verbal information will be provided to the next of kin.

An investigating officer conducts case investigations, interviews witnesses and gathers evidence. The case is then heard in court. In cases of murder of a foreign citizen where the next of kin is not present in the country, the state will represent the persecution side.

## **Legal Aid**

Free legal aid is not available to foreign nationals. However there is a list of English-speaking lawyers on the Embassy web site

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

## **Compensation**

In cases which involve acts of terrorism, murder, road and air accidents the government assigns an amount of compensation; each case is considered individually. Compensation is usually paid to all families of those involved including, foreign nationals. Information on compensation is usually disseminated by the local authorities through the media. In murder cases, the court decides the amount of compensation.

## **Useful Lists**

The lists below are provided by the Consular Section for the convenience of enquirers, but neither Her Britannic Majesty's Government nor any official of the British Embassy 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 or service given.

### **International Funeral Directors in the UK**

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/596745/International\\_Funeral\\_Directors\\_list.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596745/International_Funeral_Directors_list.pdf)

**Local funeral directors at Moscow, St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg**  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/russia-list-of-funeral-directors>

*Updated 23 March 2017*