

Death overseas



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

The death of a relative or friend is always distressing, but if it happens abroad the distress can be made worse by practical problems.

After the death of a relative or friend abroad you are likely to have countless questions. What should I do now? How can I communicate with people in a foreign language? Who can I turn to for help?

This leaflet explains what practical support British consular staff can offer you and what you need to do yourself.

Death overseas – information for relatives and friends

If a relative or friend dies while you are abroad with them

All deaths must be registered in the country where the death occurs. Your tour guide, the local police or the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can advise you on how to go about this.

Make sure you have as much documentation as possible about the person who has died and yourself. This should include:

- > full name
- > date of birth
- > passport number
- > the name of the next of kin of the person who has died.

If the person suffered from an infectious condition, for example Hepatitis or HIV viruses, it is essential that the authorities are told so that they can take

You can also apply to register the death with the UK authorities; this is called Consular Death Registration. Full details on how to do register the death with the UK authorities, including the fees, are available at www.gov.uk/register-a-death. You don't have to register the death with the UK authorities, but it means that the death will be recorded with the General Register Offices (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the National Records Office of Scotland; and that you can order a consular death registration certificate.

If you do decide to register the death with the UK authorities you will need to provide the local death certificate (with an official translation if necessary) and evidence of the deceased's British nationality (usually a copy of the British passport, or a UK birth/naturalisation certificate if no passport is available). The Foreign and Commonwealth Office issue Consular Death Registration certificates from the UK; it is not possible to register the death at a British Embassy/High Commission.

If a relative or friend dies abroad while you are in the UK

- > If the death has been reported to a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate overseas we will pass the details to the UK police and ask them to tell the next of kin as soon as possible. If the next of kin are not in the UK, we will normally ask our consular staff in the country where they are to contact local police to do this.
- > We do everything we can to make sure that, as next of kin, you do not hear of the death first from the media, but we cannot always influence this. In exceptional circumstances, to act rapidly, this may mean having to inform relatives by telephone.
- > If you hear of the death from a tour operator, the media or any other third party you should contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on 020 7008 1500 and ask for the country desk in Consular Directorate.
- > Consular staff in London will keep in touch with the family and our staff abroad until burial or cremation overseas (where local

authorities allow these for foreigners) or until the person has been brought back to the UK.

- > Consular staff in London will pass on to our staff overseas the wishes of the next of kin about funeral arrangements.
- > We will do our best to make sure these wishes are carried out.
- > But it is not always possible to do so. For example there may be no facilities for cremation. And in some countries post mortem examinations are carried out without permission of the next of kin. You should be aware that in some countries organs will be removed and kept during these procedures without the next of kin being informed or consulted. You should also be aware that in some countries a lack of suitable storage may make it impossible to obtain the necessary international certificates to transport the body.

Where you can find us

Support is provided by British diplomatic and consular missions overseas and by the Consular Directorate of the FCO in London. British diplomatic missions overseas are the British Government's main offices in other countries, usually in capital cities. These take the form of **British High Commissions** or **Deputy High Commissions** in Commonwealth countries and **British Embassies** in other countries. You may also find **British Consulates General** or **Consulates** in capital cities or regional centres. In some places where there is no British diplomatic or consular office, we have **Honorary Consuls** who can offer some limited help or put you in touch with the nearest office. Check the FCO website: www.gov.uk/fco.

What kind of help we can provide when someone has died abroad

We can:

- > keep the next of kin informed and try to ensure you don't feel that you are on your own
- > tell you the cost of local burial, local cremation and transportation of the body and personal belongings back to the UK
- > provide a list of local and international funeral directors (see note 1). If an English speaking firm is not available, our staff can help you with the arrangements
- > help transfer money from friends and relatives in the UK to pay any necessary costs.

A coroner in England and Wales will normally hold an inquest if a person died a violent or unnatural death overseas and the body is returned to the coroner's district. Different procedures for investigating deaths apply in each part of the UK. We have a booklet called 'Guide for bereaved families', which is available on the gov.uk website **www.gov.uk/government/publications**.

In the case of a major catastrophe or terrorist attack, local practices may change, and there may be delays with bodies being returned to the UK due to identification procedures.

Note 1:

Neither the Government nor the relevant British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate 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 you are given.

Murder or manslaughter overseas-how UK authorities can help

The FCO, the UK Police and the Coroners of England and Wales may all have a role to play when a British National dies overseas in these circumstances. There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the minimum standards of help you can expect from these authorities on **www.gov.uk/government/publications/murder-manslaughter-and-infanticide-of-british-nationals-abroad** in the section 'Coping with death overseas'.

Where there is evidence of suspicious circumstances concerning the death, we can give you support and suggest the best way to raise concerns with the local authorities. We can offer basic information about the local police system and legal system. When informed of how any investigation is progressing we can pass on any details. Consular staff in London are available to meet family representatives, and they can contact the next of kin if the investigating authorities tell us about any new developments. But in some countries, the investigating authorities and the courts refuse to answer enquiries from third parties, including British consular staff. In these circumstances it is very important to consider appointing a local lawyer. As with funeral directors, we can also provide lists of local lawyers and interpreters.

We cannot

- > investigate deaths ourselves
- > give legal advice
- > pay burial or cremation expenses
- > pay for the return of bodies to the UK
- > pay any debts that may be outstanding or pay any other expenses.

General help and advice

The emotions you may experience after a major personal crisis such as the death of a relative or friend can be traumatic. It is important to remember that help is available. Some people will not want or feel the need to talk to anyone outside their family and friends, but for others it may be essential. There is nothing wrong with knowing that you need help.

You can find help and advice on bereavement from your family doctor or a number of organisations, such as

The Compassionate Friends

53 North Street
Bristol BS3 1EN
Tel: 0845 123 2304
Email: helpline@tcf.org.uk
www.tcf.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

PO Box 800
Richmond
Surrey TW9 1RG
Tel: 0844 477 9400
Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk
www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Samaritans

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK
Chris, PO Box 9090
Stirling, FK8 2SA
Tel: 08457 90 90 90
www.samaritans.org

Sudden Death

PO Box 548,
Huddersfield HD1 2XZ
www.suddendeath.org.uk

Support After Murder and Manslaughter

(SAMM) Abroad
Tel: 0845 123 2384
Email: info@sammabroad.org
www.sammabroad.org

Victim Support

Cranmer House

39 Brixton Road

London SW9 6DZ

Supportline: 0845 30 30 900

www.victimsupport.com

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

Press Complaints Commission

Halton House

20/23 Holborn

London EC1N 2JD

Tel: 020 7831 0022

Email: complaints@pcc.org.uk

www.pcc.org.uk



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Tell us what you think

Giving us feedback

We welcome your views on the support we provide, what we do well and what we could do better. Visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/complaints-procedure for more information on complaints, compliments, offering feedback and participating in our research.

If you prefer to contact us directly our contact details are:

Consular Directorate

Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Email: feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

Tel: +44 (0)20 7008 1500

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The contents of this publication are correct at time of printing (June 2017).

Printed on recycled paper containing a minimum of 75% post consumer waste and 25% ECF pulp.