



**Armed Forces Medical Examiner System
115 Purple Heart Drive
Dover AFB DE 19902**

**TEL: (302) 346-8648
DSN: 366-8648
FAX: (302) 346-8819**

Updated on 05 June 2026

THE ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDICOLEGAL DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) offers you our deepest condolences on the loss of your loved one. We understand this is an incredibly difficult time and this guide is designed to explain our role, why our system is involved, and what you can expect during the medicolegal death investigation process.

Q: Why is the AFMES involved?

A: Under Federal law (Title 10, United States Code, Section 1471), AFMES is authorized to conduct medicolegal forensic investigations for deaths that occur under federal jurisdiction. AFMES may also be requested to support federal investigations of American citizen or service members who die abroad. The primary goals of a medicolegal investigation include:

- To positively identify your loved one.
- To determine the official cause and manner of death.
- To collect and document evidence that may be critical for military and federal investigations.

Q. What does the autopsy examination entail?

A: The autopsy examination is a thorough and respectful process performed by a board-certified forensic pathologist. It includes the following key phases:

Identification	Confirming identity through scientific methods such as fingerprint, dental, and/or DNA analysis. On rare occasions, identification will be established through circumstances when scientific means are not viable.
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Examination	An autopsy may include radiology studies (such as a CT scan) with both a complete external and internal examination. The external examination includes taking photographs of the decedent, noting physical characteristics, and documenting any signs of disease or evidence of trauma. An internal examination includes examining internal organs and structures. When required, selected fluids and small sections of organs may be collected for microscopic, toxicological, and DNA analyses. In complex cases, major organs may be collected, preserved, and dissected by forensic specialists for further examination. Any personal effects are photographed, inventoried, and released to the appropriate authority.
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Documentation	Examination findings and any additional diagnostics are captured in a final written report.
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Q: When and where will the AFMES perform the autopsy examination?

A: Your assigned Casualty Assistance Officer (CAO), company representative, investigating agent, or AFMES representative will provide you with the date and location of the autopsy examination.

Q: How long does a normal autopsy examination take?

A: A typical autopsy examination usually takes 2-4 hours once the remains and AFMES staff arrive at a facility capable of supporting medicolegal investigations. However, if DNA analysis is required for positive identification, the process may take additional time before remains can be released, assuming a suitable reference sample is available for comparison.

Q: When will I know the results?

A: In most cases, the medicolegal death investigation will be completed and a final report issued within 6 to 12 weeks.

Q: How do I request a copy of the final autopsy report?

A: To request a report, please submit AFMES Form 3 entitled "Request for Autopsy Report and Supplemental Information." To protect your privacy and minimize intrusion during your time of bereavement, we ask that all requests be in writing. In compliance with the Privacy Act of 1974, all requests must include a copy of a government-issued photo ID (e.g., driver's license or DoD family member ID card).

Please note: Final autopsy reports do not include photographs of the autopsy unless specifically requested.

You can find the form and submit your request via:

Website <http://www.dha.mil/afmes> (under Forms and Resources)

Email dha.dover.afmes.mbx.operations@health.mil

Fax (302) 346-8819

Mail Armed Forces Medical Examiner System
 Attn: Forensic Pathology Investigations
 115 Purple Heart Drive
 Dover AFB, DE 19902

Q: Does AFMES issue the death certificate?

A: Issuance depends on where the death occurred:

Outside the United States AFMES may issue a death certificate if we performed the examination and the host nation did not issue one of their own, or if their certificate required updates based on our examination findings.

Requests can be emailed directly to: dha.dover.afmes.list.msd@health.mil

Inside the United States AFMES does not issue the death certificate. Death certificates must be requested through the Vital Statistics Office in the state where the death occurred.

Contact the local or state Vital Statistics Office in the jurisdiction where the death occurred.

Q: May I speak with the Medical Examiner?

A: Yes. The staff of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System is available to discuss autopsy findings with you and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to speak with a Medical Examiner, please call us at (302) 346-8648.

Attachments: (1) Autopsy Request Form; (2) Frequently Asked Questions Acknowledgement Form

REQUEST FOR AUTOPSY REPORT AND SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

DATA REQUIRED BY THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974

AUTHORITY: Title 10 USC, Section 1471
PRINCIPAL PURPOSE: To obtain records/reports of remains by persons legally authorized access to this information.
ROUTINE USES: By Department of Defense and other agencies to document and authorize actions necessary for the release of post-autopsy supplemental information.
DISCLOSURE: Disclosure of requested information is voluntary. Without disclosure your desires may not be recorded and accommodated.

NAME OF DECEASED (Last, First, Middle Initial)	SERVICE/RANK OF DECEASED	SSN OF DECEASED OR DOD ID #
TYPED OR PRINTED NAME OF REQUESTOR	REQUESTOR DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER(S)	
RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED/REASON FOR NEED TO KNOW	REQUESTOR EMAIL	
	FOR FPI USE: RECEIPT DATE/TIME	

I, the undersigned, am requesting to receive a copy of the official autopsy report written and maintained by Forensic Pathology Investigations (FPI), Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES).

I wish to receive the following:

Initials	I would like to receive a copy of the official autopsy report written by the FPI Medical Examiner.
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I understand official federal business requests will be sent via encrypted email and/or a secure DoD file sharing system unless otherwise specified. I understand I may elect to receive requested information for personal reasons at my home address or choose another individual (such as a casualty assistance office, family member, counselor, etc.) to whom the requested information is sent on my behalf.

Please send the requested information to the following (select one):

Official Business Request. Send via encrypted email (unless otherwise specified):		
Initials	OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT EMAIL (MANDATORY)	
	Please deliver the requested material to my home address:	
Initials	SHIPMENT ADDRESS (NOTE: FEDEX DOES NOT DELIVER TO P.O. BOXES)	RELATIONSHIP TO ADDRESSEE
	Please deliver the requested material to the following individual on my behalf:	
Initials	TYPED OR PRINTED NAME OF ADDRESSEE	ADDRESSEE DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER(S)
	SHIPMENT ADDRESS (NOTE: FEDEX DOES NOT DELIVER TO P.O. BOXES)	RELATIONSHIP TO ADDRESSEE

SIGNATURE OF REQUESTOR	DATE
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PLEASE INCLUDE A PHOTOCOPY OF A CURRENT GOVERNMENT-ISSUED PHOTO ID WITH YOUR REQUEST.

We cannot process your request without verification of your identity and your legal right to this information, in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended.

IF YOU ARE REQUESTING THIS INFORMATION FOR OFFICIAL BUSINESS, PLEASE INCLUDE A COPY OF YOUR APPOINTMENT LETTER OR A MEMORANDUM OF JUSTIFICATION ON FORMAL LETTERHEAD CITING YOUR NEED TO KNOW.

If you have questions, please contact the Armed Forces Medical Examiner at (302) 346-8648.

Submit this request form and a copy of your ID or letter of justification via one of the following modes:

Email: dha.dover.afmes.mbx.operations@health.mil
 Mail: Armed Forces Medical Examiner System
 115 Purple Heart Drive
 Dover Air Force Base, DE 19902
 Fax: (302) 346-8819

Controlled by : AFMES Controlled by : Director, Forensic Pathology Investigations Category: DREC/INV/PRVCY LDC: FEDCON POC: 302-346-8648
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT OF ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DOCUMENT

DATA REQUIRED BY THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974

NAME OF DECEASED:	RANK OF DECEASED:	SSN OF DECEASED:
TYPED/PRINTED NAME OF PERSON AUTHORIZED TO DIRECT DISPOSITION (PADD) OR NEXT OF KIN (NOK):		RELATIONSHIP:

I, the undersigned, do hereby acknowledge receipt of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) About Medicolegal Examinations document. I understand that should I have any questions about medicolegal investigations or my loved one's autopsy, I may obtain additional information via the AFMES website at <https://dha.mil/AFMES> or I may contact AFMES directly via the contact information provided on the cover sheet and page 4.

ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM

<https://dha.mil/AFMES> Main

Office
(302) 346-8648

Forensic Pathology Investigations
dha.dover.afmes.mbx.operations@health.mil

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

PADD/NOK ACKNOWLEDGMENT SIGNATURE

TYPED/PRINTED NAME OF PADD OR NOK:	SIGNATURE OF PADD OR NOK:	DATE:
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