

What Happens After A Sudden & Unexpected Loss: A Guide for Families



1. Scene Investigation

Because your child's death was sudden and unexpected, the county medical examiner and/or law enforcement may examine the scene. This is a standard part of the death investigation. It is not meant to blame anyone.

2. Autopsy and Review of Medical Records

To help find out why your child died, the medical examiner will likely order an autopsy and review your child's medical records. It may be helpful to stay in contact with the Regional Autopsy Center for the latest updates.

3. After the Autopsy

Once the autopsy is completed your child's body can be picked up by the funeral home or location of your choice. You will not be asked to travel to the Regional Autopsy Center.

4. Death Certificate and Autopsy Report

Finalizing the death certificate with an official cause of death can take time. You can ask for copies from the Register of Deeds in the county where the death happened, or the State Vital Records Office for a fee. Funeral homes can often help with this process.

Autopsy reports are available for free through the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner's website. Finalizing them may take time. Please know these reports may be graphic, hard to read, and may not give answers. They are not meant to cast blame. For questions or help understanding these reports, your family doctor or child's pediatrician may be helpful.

Additional Information:

You can find more information and helpful resources from the North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner through this QR code:

For questions or updates on your child's investigation you may call the NC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner at 919-743-9000 or 800-672-7024, then press 3.



How Did This Happen?

In North Carolina, Sudden and Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) during a sleep period is the third leading cause of infant death. For more information about what can lead to infant death during sleep, you can visit Safe Sleep NC's website via the QR code:

