

## Frequently Asked Questions

Does every death involve the coroner?

The coroner has jurisdiction over all deaths that occur in their county under suspicious, unusual or unnatural circumstances. The coroner may also be involved in natural deaths that were unattended by a physician. The coroner will actually investigate approximately 12% of the deaths in their county and 60% of those may be natural deaths.

Does the coroner's office provide all death certificates?

Death certificates are the responsibility of the vital records division of the county health department. The coroner will sign the certificate for coroner cases and then turn the certificate over to the health department for completion. The certificate is to be filed within 72 hours, but the cause and manner of death can be deferred pending further investigation.

Is the coroner a physician?

Indiana has a coroner system, not a medical examiner system. As an elected official to a constitutional office the legal requirements are that the individual be a resident of the county for a least one year. The coroner serves the role of an administrator of the death investigation.

Are there educational requirements for coroners and deputy coroners?

Indiana law requires the Medicolegal Death Investigator (MDI) training and certification for all elected coroners and all appointed deputy coroners. They are required to attend a 40 hour course, complete an externship with a board certified pathologist, and pass an exam. 16 hours of continuing education are required annually.

What is the coroner responsible for?

The coroner is responsible for identification of the deceased, determination of the cause of death and determination of the manner of death. In the process of doing his/her job, the coroner is considered an officer of the court with the power to investigate the death, subpoena information, and order an autopsy. The coroner is also responsible for the personal property of the deceased.

Can the cause and manner of death be kept confidential?

The coroner is obligated to release certain information regarding each coroner's case, including the cause and manner of death. Demographic information is considered public, such as name, age, race and address of deceased. Limited information regarding an autopsy will be released, such as date, person who performed it, where performed and location to which body was removed. The coroner can only release records produced in

the process of the investigation. Records of other agencies, such as police records or medical records (including autopsy reports) gathered in the investigation are not released by the coroner.

How long does it take to determine the cause of death?

In the age of television we expect investigations to be completed in the sixty (60) minute time frame. When the cause of death is dependent upon the pathologist's study and lab tests, four to six (4-6) weeks or more may be necessary. More in depth tests than the familiar breathalyzer are used and instant answers are not possible. The resulting information is more helpful to the family in understanding exactly what happened to their loved one. Also, careful documentation gives insurance companies the facts they need to pay death benefits.