



# What to do when someone dies at home

Information for patients, carers and families

**Even though you know the person is dying, and you can try to prepare yourself, it is hard to know how you might feel when they actually die.**

**Some people feel shocked or numb, while other people might feel overwhelmed with sadness, or even anger.**

It is also normal, particularly if it has been a long illness to feel a huge relief.

You may find it helps if you have already thought of someone you can call who can be with you and support you at this time.

## Confirming the person has died

Although this is likely to be a very emotional time, there are still some formal things that need to happen. The first is confirming that the person has died. This is called 'verifying the death'.

Following a death at home at any time, the community nurse will need to be contacted using the number on the contacts list. There is no rush to do this, take the time you need to say important things and have those last special moments together. When you are ready you should contact the person's community nursing team. A nurse will come as soon as possible to confirm that the person has died. There is no need to call 999.

There are some things that need to be done to confirm the death, and some people prefer to leave the room when this is happening. This includes checking the person's pupils for any reaction, checking for breathing, and listening for their heart sounds with a stethoscope.

Although nurses can verify someone has died, when their death was expected, only a doctor can give you a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD). The doctors' surgery will contact you when this is ready to collect.

## Getting support

People experience loss and grief differently; it is entirely individual. You might not need bereavement support now; however, you might need it later or another member of your family may need some support.

Information on bereavement support can be found on the Norfolk and Waveney knowledge NoW website:  
<https://nwknowledge.nhs.uk>

- Utility companies
- Their GP, dentist, optician and anyone else providing medical care
- Any charities, organisations or magazine subscriptions the deceased person made regular payments to
- The bereavement register will cancel all advertising, sales literature [www.thebereavementregister.org.uk](http://www.thebereavementregister.org.uk)

### Deal with the estate and apply for probate

What you need to do to deal with the estate – the money, property and possessions – of the person who has died depends on whether they made a valid Will and, if they did, whether you're named as an executor in that Will.

For a Will to be valid, it must have been signed by the deceased and witnessed by 2 people.

If they did make a valid Will and you've been appointed as an executor, then you will need to apply for a Grant of Probate to deal with the estate. Probate is the legal process of distributing someone's estate after they die.

If there is a solicitor involved, then contact should be made and advice sought.

You may be contacted by a medical examiner, who is an independent doctor who will talk to you about the death and the circumstances before a MCCD (death certificate) is issued, please do not worry, this is routine practice.

### Arrange for the deceased person to be collected

Once the death has been confirmed you can contact a funeral director of your choice who will arrange to collect. If you choose to use a direct cremation / burial service, you should contact them directly.

There is no need to call 999 or 111.

### Registering the death

Registering the death is one of the first things you need to do when you have received the Medical Certificate Cause of Death (MCCD). You can start planning the funeral beforehand, but you will not be able to actually hold it until you have registered the death. Legally, you need to do this within five days of receiving the MCCD.

You can register a death at any register office, but if you use the one in the area where the person died you can be given the documents you'll need on the day.

If you use a different register office, the documents will be sent to the office in the area where the person died before they're issued to you. This means you'll usually wait a few days. The one thing you absolutely must take with you is the medical certificate showing the cause of death.

## When you register the death, you will be given:

- **Death Certificates** – These are all certified copies of the original entry which stays with the Registrar and are usually a light green colour. You can request as many of these as you wish, though there will be a charge for each copy. If anyone asks you for an original Death Certificate, this is what they mean.
- **Certificate for Cremation or Burial** – Commonly referred to as the “Green Form” this allows the Funeral Director to officially go ahead with the funeral arrangements.
- **BD8 - Registration of Notification of Death** – DWP – You might not need this if you are offered the Tell Us Once service to notify the Government organisations of the death, but please note this service isn’t available in all areas. The Registrar will be able to tell you whether this is available.

## Arranging a funeral

Before you start organising the funeral, it is worth doing a little bit of thinking and planning to give you confidence and reassurance.

Check if the person who died left any instructions about what they wanted – some people leave instructions in their Will. Or they may have left some informal notes, or simply have talked it through with someone close to them.

They may have left instructions on whether they would like to be buried or cremated. There might also be a particular place where they would like the service to be held. They may have chosen readings or music that they would like to be played. If they have not left any instructions, you may want to talk with family members about these different choices.

You don’t need to wait until the person has died to start planning their funeral. Sometimes it can give the person approaching the end of their life reassurance to know that some of the arrangements are already in place.

The funeral director will need the Certificate for Burial or Cremation (the ‘green form’) and the MCCD in order to start organising the funeral.

You can arrange a funeral without the help of a funeral director. If you wish to do this, contact the Cemeteries and Crematorium Department of your local authority for advice and guidance. [www.norwich.gov.uk/cemeteries](http://www.norwich.gov.uk/cemeteries) .

## Tell organisations about the death

When someone dies, you must get in touch with certain organisations to let them know as soon as possible. There is a service called Tell Us Once which will contact several government departments about the death in one go.

You will need to return the person’s drivers licence to the DVLA and their passport to HM Passport Office.

## You may need to contact other organisations as well, such as:

- Personal or occupational pension scheme providers
- Insurance companies
- Banks and building societies
- An employer or trade union
- A mortgage provider, private landlord, housing association or council housing office
- Social services if the person received community care