



Arkansas State Crime Laboratory
3 Natural Resources Drive
Little Rock AR 72205

The mission of the
Arkansas State Crime
Laboratory is to provide
timely, accurate, and
reliable forensic science
through a collaborative
approach that best
serves Arkansans

Crime Laboratory:

Main: (501) 227-5747

Fax: (501) 227-0713

<https://dps.arkansas.gov/>

Medical Examiner's Section:

Main: (501) 227-5936

Fax: (501) 221-1653

Revised: 2025-11-24

Arkansas State Crime Laboratory
3 Natural Resources Drive
Little Rock AR 72205



Arkansas State Crime Laboratory

ASCL

Medical Examiner Services Brochure

Theodore T. Brown, M.D.

Chief Medical Examiner and Director

Tel (501) 227-5747
Fax (501) 227-0713
<https://dps.arkansas.gov>



When a loved one dies suddenly or unexpectedly, by unnatural or violent means, family members are left bereaved, sometimes confused, and perhaps angry. One way to help the family understand what happened to their loved one is by performing a medicolegal postmortem examination.

Arkansas Code § 12-12-315 states that whenever someone dies in these circumstances, that the county coroner, police, sheriff, state police, warden, or prosecutor may request an examination by the Medical Examiner's Section to determine the cause and manner of death. Permission from the next of kin is not required in these circumstances.

We know that you will have questions about the procedures in the Medical Examiner's Office at the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory and have prepared this pamphlet to help families better understand what can seem like a very complicated process.



The Arkansas State Medical Examiner's Office is committed to providing the highest quality medicolegal services to the state and families of Arkansas.

The Medical Examiner's Office at the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory is authorized to transport the deceased person from the county of origin (i.e., where the incident occurred) or where the deceased is being held after the pronouncement of death (e.g., a hospital or funeral home).

The bodies of such deceased persons shall be returned to the county from which they were brought at the expense of the Crime Laboratory only if the Medical Examiner determines death was a homicide, SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome), or a jail custody death. For all suicides, accidents, or natural deaths, the expense of transporting and returning the bodies shall be borne by whomever requested the examination (A.C.A. § 12-12-316).

When an examination has been performed by the Crime Laboratory, a certificate of death is issued with the deceased when they are released to the funeral home, unless the death was pronounced out of state. A death certificate serves to certify that a death has occurred, and even if it does not initially have a specific cause or manner of death listed (e.g., "Pending"), it is still considered an official document and is registered at the County Health Department and sent to the State Health Department, Bureau of Vital Records. Copies of the death certificate can be obtained by families either from the funeral home or by contacting the Bureau of Vital Records directly at (501) 661-2336.

If the death certificate has been ruled "Pending", the Medical Examiner will issue a supplemental death certificate when they have made a final ruling as to the cause and/or manner of death, which is then mailed to the State Bureau of Vital Records in Little Rock. This may take weeks or, in some instances, months because of the complexity of the case, as well as any necessary laboratory and investigative studies.

Once the postmortem examination has been completed, the Medical Examiner will release the body to the funeral home chosen by the next-of-kin. The Medical Examiner's Section requires written authorization from the funeral home before the body can be released (ME FORM 56).

The family is encouraged to call our office to check on the status of reports and death certificates, but please allow the Medical Examiner a minimum of three months for the completion of the final examination autopsy report. This allows sufficient time for all ancillary testing to be completed.

A postmortem examination report is prepared for every case submitted to the Crime Laboratory. This report contains the investigative and medical findings of the case, including toxicology. An "opinion" page at the end helps explain the findings and the reason(s) for the determination of the cause and manner of death.

This report is released to the coroner, investigating agency, and the prosecutor in all cases. The next-of-kin can request a copy of the report by contacting the Medical Examiner's Office. Insurance companies and attorneys in civil proceedings can request a copy of the report from the Medical Examiner's Office for a fee of \$50.00.

Our reports are privileged and confidential as described in A.C.A. § 12-12-312, and may require additional authorization for release, either from the prosecuting attorney in the county where the incident occurred or via a court order from a court of competent jurisdiction.

We hope this pamphlet has been helpful in answering some of the questions you may have. Please feel free to call our office from Monday to Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., if you have any other questions.