**Nebraska Coroner**

**Standard Operating**

**Procedure and Policy Guidelines**

[](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a8/AmCyc_Nebraska_-_seal.jpg)

# INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Legislature, with the adoption of Nebraska Revised Statute Section 23-1213.01, directed the creation of model policies by the Nebraska County Attorneys Standards Advisory Counsel. In concert with the Nebraska County Attorneys Association, members of law enforcement and professionals in the medical community, the following model policies and forms were developed. It represents examples that should be customized for maximum usefulness in each jurisdiction, with input from the county attorneys, law enforcement, and other local resources (*i.e.*, EMTs, firefighters, etc.)

The duties of the county coroner fall upon the county attorney, but can be delegated to law enforcement. N.R.S. § 23-1210.

In each county the coroner can appoint a coroners physician. Such physician shall certify the cause of death in every case of death not certified by an attending physician and shall perform or cause to be performed an autopsy when requested by the coroner. NRS § 23-1820.

It should be the goal of each county attorney to facilitate cooperation with law enforcement and all available local resources to best serve the citizens while fulfilling coroner duties.

The death investigation is generally the responsibility of the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction where the death or process leading to death occurred.

In order to preserve the ability to prosecute the circumstances surrounding a death, the county attorney shall make every effort to avoid becoming a witness with respect to the investigation. The county attorney, however, must assure that the evidence pertaining to the death investigation is properly collected and preserved in a manor suitable for use in court. The evidence collected may come from several sources such as scene investigations, witness interviews, and medical examination. These guidelines provide a framework for death investigation and can be used as a checklist to verify that all necessary information is obtained.

Child death investigation is covered under specific guidelines. NRS § 23-1824.

Cooperation with organ retrieval processes is expected. NRS § 23-1827.

Assistance in investigation is available from the Nebraska State Patrol.

Assistance in prosecution is available from the State Attorney Generals Office.

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CORONER

1. The Coroner is on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
2. Receive all reports of sudden, unexpected, or unexplained deaths.
3. Respond to all sudden, unexpected, or unexplained deaths.
4. In the absence of a medical personnel, pronounce death.
5. Protect the chain of custody of the body and all evidence obtained.
6. Conduct, participate, or advise in the investigation leading to the determination of the cause and manner of death.
7. Provide input to verify that all necessary samples from the body are obtained, and arrange for necessary tests upon those samples that will aid in the determination of the cause and manner of death. Review the proper chain of custody and evidence on those samples; verify that the samples are maintained for an appropriate period of time.
8. Certify the cause and manner of death. The manner of death shall be one of the following: natural, accident, suicide, homicide, or undetermined, as prescribed on the Nebraska Death Certificate.
9. Properly dispose of human remains through release to family or designated and authorized entities.
10. Provide accurate identification of all human remains when possible.
11. Contact, or coordinate the contact of family members, police agencies, health care professionals, and the public through the media, assist mortuaries in facilitating the prompt release of a decedent for a funeral or other arrangements for the family
12. Maintain records of each official death investigation. The Nebraska Secretary of State requires a four year minimum retention of coroner files per Schedule No. 93.

# DETERMINATION OF DEATH

A determination of death shall be in accordance with accepted medical standards.

Generally, an individual is determined to be dead if:

1. He/she has sustained irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions; or
2. He/she has sustained irreversible cessations of all functions of the entire brain, including the brainstem.

Death can be assumed in:

1. The presence of rigor mortis, livor mortis, decomposition or severe mutilation
2. Absence of a heart beat on palpation
3. The absence of respiration by examination of the exposed chest and abdomen
4. Bilateral dilation and fixation of the pupils
5. Absence of reflexes

# REPORTING DEATHS

All deaths resulting from the following circumstances should be reported to the corner.

1. From diseases which may be hazardous or contagious or which may constitute a threat to the health of the general public
2. From external violence, an unexplained cause, or under suspicious circumstances
3. Where no physician is in attendance, or where, through attendance, the physician is unable to certify the cause of death
4. From thermal, chemical, or radiation injury
5. From criminal abortion
6. While in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated
7. When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was considered in good health.
8. From an industrial accident or any death suspected to be involved with the decedent's occupation
9. When death occurs in a hospital less than 24 hours after admission to a hospital or after any invasive procedure
10. Any death suspected to be due to alcohol intoxication or the result of exposure to drugs or toxic agents
11. Any death due to neglect or suspected neglect.
12. Any stillbirth of 20 or more weeks gestational age unattended by a physician.
13. Any maternal death to include death of a pregnant woman regardless of length of the pregnancy, and up to six weeks (or one year) post-delivery, even where the cause of death is unrelated to the pregnancy.
14. Any death of an infant or child where the medical history has not established a significant pre-existing condition.

Deaths occurring outside of the county, but the initial life-ending event took place within the county are the responsibility of the county of origin.

# DEATH INVESTIGATION

This section outlines the basic processing of virtually every death investigation. No two deaths are exactly the same and specific types require specific guidelines. These guidelines should be followed to investigate the basics of any death. Specific death types with corresponding scene forms/checklists will be found in the appendix of these guidelines.

## EMERGENCY RESPONDERS

An emergency medical team summoned to any scene for purposes of rendering medical attention to a human being has sole authority in determining when or when not to initiate resuscitative measures. In cases where rigor mortis, liver mortis or decomposition is obvious, or where mutilation is so severe as to preclude life, the first responder may presume that death has occurred.

Physicians (MD & DO), coroners and appropriate persons designated by the county attorney are the only ones who can make an official pronouncement of death. The information obtained from the first responders (EMTs, firefighters, etc.) can be critical to the investigation and shall be immediately obtained and memorialized if at all possible.

## MEDICAL RECORDS / HISTORY

All appropriate medical history and records should be obtained which may assist in the investigation. This includes records generated by the emergency responders, hospital admission, and outpatient care.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY AUTHORITY AND JURISDICTION

The law enforcement agencies of jurisdiction and the coroner must work together in the investigation of reportable deaths. General guidelines call for the first law enforcement responder to:

1. Tend the injured
2. Arrest the perpetrator
3. Hold the scene
4. Make initial determination of criminality vs. no criminality
5. Immediately notify the coroner through established procedures

Under no circumstance (except where there is danger to the body or to others at the scene) is the body to be moved or tampered with in any way until an investigator arrives at the scene. (*Due to potential scene hazards, the body may have to be removed before scene investigation can be continued; e.g., crowd control, collapsing structures, poisonous gases, traffic, etc.*). Any actions involving the decedent by any responders or witnesses will be documented by the law enforcement case agent designated and relayed to the coroner on his/her arrival; e.g., CPR administered by passerby, body turned over by EMS, articles removed initially by witnesses or first responders, etc.

## WITNESS INTERVIEWS

All pertinent witnesses should be identified and interviewed as soon as possible. Witnesses should be interviewed away from others so that their testimony is not influenced.

1. ESTABLISH PROBABLE LOCATION OF INJURY OR ILLNESS

The location where the decedent is found may not be the actual location where the injury/illness that contributed to the death occurred. The investigation must attempt to determine the locations of any and all injuries/illnesses that may have contributed to the death. Physical evidence at any and all locations may be pertinent in establishing the cause, manner, and circumstances of death. In those cases where the decedent is pronounced in a hospital but the injury/illness occurred at another location, the investigation must, to the extent deemed practical, conduct a scene investigation at the site or sites where the injury/illness occurred.

## SCENE INVESTIGATION

The management of all death scenes is the responsibility of the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction. A scene investigation will be conducted in all reportable deaths unless otherwise specified.

If required at the scene, the coroner will introduce him/herself to those individuals who are responsible for conducting the investigation. Introductions at the scene allow the coroner to establish formal contact with other official agency representatives. The coroner must identify the first responder to ascertain if any artifacts or contamination have been introduced to the death scene. The coroner must work with all key people to ensure scene safety prior to his/her entrance into the scene.

Upon arrival at the scene, and prior to entering the scene, the coroner should:

1. Assess and/or establish physical boundaries
2. Identify incident command and identify the lead investigator at the scene and present identification
3. Identify other essential officials at the scene (law enforcement, fire, EMS, social/child protective services, etc.)
4. Identify and document the identity of the first essential official(s) to the scene (first “professional” arrival at the scene for investigative follow-up) to ascertain if any artifacts or contamination may have been introduced to the death scene
5. Obtain clearance/authorization to enter scene from the individual responsible for scene safety
6. Determine scene safety (prior to entry)
7. Use personal protective safety equipment
8. While exercising scene safety, protect the integrity of the scene and evidence to the extent possible from contamination or loss by people, animals, and elements
9. CONFIRM OR PRONOUNCE DEATH

Upon arrival at a secured scene and after the appropriate introductions have been made, if death has not already been established, the coroner shall be taken to the decedent for pronouncement of death, making and documenting the following observations:

1. Locate and view the body
2. Ensure death is pronounced as required.
3. When summoned to a scene where multiple deaths have occurred, the time and date of pronouncement for all bodies at the scene will be the same, unless specific evidence to the contrary exists.

If death has already been established, then the coroner should identify and document the individual who made the official pronouncement of death, including the date and time of determination.

1. PARTICIPATE IN SCENE BRIEFING WITH ATTENDING AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

The coroner must recognize the varying jurisdictional and statutory responsibilities that apply to individual agency representatives (e.g., law enforcement, fire, EMT, judicial/legal). Determining each agency's investigative responsibility at the scene is essential in planning the scope and depth of each scene investigation and the release of information to the public.

The coroner will work with law enforcement authorities to identify specific responsibilities, share appropriate preliminary information and understand investigative goals of each agency present at the scene. Discussions with the investigator, criminalistics and/or crime laboratory personnel and the coroner will outline the requirements of each agency for processing the scene. The law enforcement officers/investigators and criminalistics personnel will determine how access will be managed. A discussion may take place at this time to determine if other expertise or consultation with other agencies is required.

When participating in the scene briefing, the coroner should:

1. Locate the staging area (entry point to scene, command post, etc.).
2. Document the scene location (address, mile marker, building name) consistent with other agencies.
3. Determine the nature and scope of investigation by obtaining preliminary investigative details (e.g., suspicious versus non-suspicious death).
4. Ensure that initial accounts of the incident are obtained from the first witness or witnesses.
5. The law enforcement lead officer/investigator shall apprise the coroner of the facts surrounding the death and information pertaining to a suspected cause and manner of death. The request for the presence of a pathologist or other forensic specialist will be discussed at this time.
6. If criminality is suspected and a crime scene investigation is required, the lead investigator or the coroner will wait for the arrival of the criminalistics unit.

SCENE “WALKTHROUGH”: Conducting a scene walkthrough provides the coroner with an overview of the entire scene. The walkthrough provides the coroner with the first opportunity to locate and view the body, identify valuable and/or fragile evidence and determine initial investigative procedures providing for a systematic examination and documentation of the scene and body. If pronouncement of death has not occurred, it will be done at this time.

Prior to or during the scene walkthrough, the following may be required:

1. Assessment of the scene boundaries – adjust as appropriate (usually the responsibility of law enforcement)
2. Establishing paths of entry and exit (usually the responsibility of law enforcement)
3. Identifying visible physical and fragile evidence
4. Documenting and photographing fragile evidence immediately
5. Locating and viewing the decedent
6. CHAIN OF CUSTODY

Ensuring the integrity of the evidence by establishing and maintaining a chain of custody is vital to an investigation. This will safeguard against subsequent allegations of tampering, theft, planting and contamination of evidence. Prior to the removal of any evidence, the custodian(s) of evidence shall be designated and shall generate and maintain a chain of custody for all evidence collected. Throughout the investigation, those responsible for preserving the chain of custody should:

1. Document location of the scene and time of arrival of the investigators at the scene
2. Determine custodian(s) of evidence, determine which agency is responsible for collection of specific types of evidence, and determine evidence collection priority for fragile/fleeting evidence
3. Identify, secure, and preserve evidence with proper containers, labels, and preservatives
4. Document the collection of evidence by recording its location at the scene, time of collection, and time and location of disposition

Prior to or upon arrival at the death scene, the coroner should work with other agencies to:

1. Determine the need for a search warrant (discuss with appropriate agencies)
2. Identify local, state, and federal laws that might apply
3. Identify statutes and/or standard operating guidelines

### DOCUMENTING AND EVALUATING THE SCENE

### Generally a Law Enforcement Function

* 1. PHOTOGRAPH THE SCENE

Photography allows for the best permanent documentation of the death scene. It is essential that accurate scene photographs are available for other investigators, agencies, and authorities to recreate the scene. Photographs are a permanent record of the terminal event and retain evidentiary value and authenticity. It is essential that the coroner obtain accurate photographs before release of the scene. If evidence has been moved prior to photography, it should be noted in the report, but the body or other evidence should not be reintroduced into the scene in order to take photographs. When appropriate and prior to moving the body or evidence, the coroner should:

1. Remove all nonessential personnel from the scene
2. Obtain an overall (wide-angle) view of the scene to spatially locate the specific scene to the surrounding area
3. Photograph specific areas of the scene to provide more detailed views of specific areas within the larger scene
4. Photograph the scene from different angles to provide various perspectives that may uncover additional evidence
5. Crime scene personnel/law enforcement officers will identify all physical evidence that is available and upon completion of this identification, photographs will be taken. The coroner may photograph all evidence that is necessary for the investigation but only under the guidance and jurisdiction of the criminalistics team.
6. Obtain some photographs with markers to document specific evidence
7. Obtain photographs even if the body or other evidence has been moved
   1. DESCRIPTIVE DOCUMENTATION OF THE SCENE

Written documentation of the scene provides a permanent record that may be used to correlate with and enhance photographic documentation, refresh recollections, and record observations.

After photographic documentation of the scene and prior to removal of the body or other evidence, the investigation should:

* 1. Diagram (not to scale)/describe in writing items of evidence and their relationship to the body with necessary markers
  2. Describe scene environment including odors, lighting, temperature, and other fragile evidence
  3. If evidence has been moved prior to written documentation, it should be noted in the report

The scene report should:

1. Document location where death was confirmed (i.e., in cases where the decedent is pronounced in a hospital but the injury occurred at another location, the investigator must conduct, to the extent deemed practical, a scene investigation at the injury site as well).
2. Determine location from which decedent was transported and how the body was transported from the scene
3. Identify and record rigor mortis, livor mortis, and body temperature as appropriate
4. Check body, clothing, and scene for consistency/inconsistency of trace evidence and indicate location where artifacts are found
5. Check for drag marks (on body and ground)
6. Establish post-injury/illness activity
7. Obtain (police and/or ambulance) records as appropriate
8. Interview family members and associates as appropriate

After personal property and evidence have been identified at the scene, the coroner should consider the following:

Alcohol in a death scene: It will be the responsibility of the investigation to report the presence of alcohol at the scene. In instances involving MVA, record the condition of a driver as determined by the police agency when the driver survives but the passenger(s) do not.

Record any evidence of drinking within the scene or indications that a perpetrator had been drinking. Record any indication at a scene of current consumption of alcohol. Record any indication of chronic alcohol abuse on the part of the decedent.

Drugs – licit and illicit: In cases where medications (prescription or over the counter) are present at a death scene and relate to the death, the investigation will collect and reconcile all prescription medications.

Illicit drugs and any paraphernalia associated with these are to be collected by the law enforcement agency in charge. These materials are not to be inventoried on the Medication Log but must be recorded on the Report of Death.

Money, valuables, and personal property: If it falls under the jurisdiction of the coroner, he/she will inventory, collect, and safeguard money, valuables, and personal property at the scene and when the body is examined in the field or at the morgue.

1. INTERVIEWING WITNESSES AT THE SCENE

Documented comments of witnesses at the scene allow the investigation to obtain primary source data regarding discovery of body, witness corroboration, and terminal history. The documented interview provides essential information for the investigative process. Under no circumstance should the coroner question a witness at the scene of a death without the prior approval and participation of the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction.

The coroner's report will include the source of information, including specific statements and information provided by the witness. The coroner should:

1. Collect all available identifying data on witnesses (e.g., full name, address, work and home telephone numbers, etc.)
2. Establish witness' relationship/association to the deceased
3. Establish the basis of witness' knowledge (how does witness have knowledge of the death?)
4. Obtain information from each witness
5. The discrepancies from the scene briefing (verify statements)

### DOCUMENTING AND EVALUATING THE BODY

PHOTOGRAPH THE BODY: The photographic documentation of the body at the scene creates a permanent record that preserves essential details of the body position, appearance, identity, and final movement. Photographs allow sharing of information with other agencies investigating the death. Prior to moving the body or evidence, the investigation should:

1. Photograph the body and immediate scene (including the decedent as initially found)
2. Photograph the decedent's face
3. Take additional photographs after removal of objects/items that interfere with photographic documentation of the decedent (e.g., body removed from car)
4. Photograph the decedent with and without measurements (as appropriate)
5. Photograph the surface beneath the body (after the body has been removed, as appropriate)
6. Take multiple images when appropriate
7. EXTERNAL BODY EXAMINATION (SUPERFICIAL)

Conducting the external examination provides the investigation with objective data regarding the single most important piece of evidence at the scene, the body. This documentation provides detailed information regarding the decedent's physical attributes, his/her relationship to the scene, and possible cause, manner, and circumstances of death. At the direction of the officer in charge and in agreement with the criminalistics personnel, a body search can be conducted. At the scene and prior to moving the decedent, the investigator should, without removing the decedent's clothing:

1. Document the decedent's position
2. Document the decedent's physical characteristics
3. Document the presence or absence of clothing and personal effects
4. Document the presence or absence of any items/objects that may be relevant
5. Document the presence or absence of marks, scars, and tattoos
6. Document the presence or absence of injury/trauma, petechiae, etc.
7. Document the presence of treatment or resuscitative efforts
8. Based on the findings, determine the need for further evaluation/assistance of forensic specialists
9. PRESERVE EVIDENCE (BODY)

The photographic and written documentation of evidence on the body allows the coroner to obtain a permanent historical record of that evidence. To maintain chain of custody, evidence must be collected, preserved, and transported properly. Physical evidence visible on the body must be photographed. Fragile evidence (that which can easily be contaminated, lost or altered) must also be collected and/or preserved to maintain chain of custody and to assist in determination of cause, manner and circumstances of death.

Once evidence on the body is recognized, the investigator should:

1. Photograph the evidence
2. Document blood/body fluid on the body (froth/purge, substances from orifices), location, and pattern before transporting
3. Ensure the decedent's hands and/or feet are placed in unused paper bags (in all homicides or deaths resulting from gunshot wounds)
4. Ensure the proper collection of blood and body fluids for subsequent analysis (as appropriate)
5. All items, evidentiary or otherwise, that are on or in the body will remain with the body and taken into custody by the coroner

Trace evidence (A law enforcement function):

1. Photograph the item where it is found, prior to any attempt to disturb it. It may help to make it stand out by the use of an arrow or some other marker, but definitely include a measuring device such as a short ruler.
2. Make a diagram of the body, showing the area where the evidence is located. Identify the location on the body where the evidence in question has been found, such as the lower abdomen, inner thigh, left forearm, etc. It is helpful to use measurements marking from the nearest identifiable landmark, for example: 2 inches below the nipple of the left breast or 4 inches above the navel.
3. Select an appropriate means to package or preserve the evidence. Plastic bags should not be used for anything that might be subject to change or alteration by moisture. The most effective means of packaging most evidence is a paper bag, cardboard box or paper envelope. This allows air to pass freely and prevents moisture from forming on the inside of the bag or on the evidence.
4. Always wear gloves when handling evidence or the body. This is not only an effective means of protection from diseases that might be present; but it also inhibits anything being added to the evidence, such as sweat from your skin.
5. Everything you remove from the body prior to transport must be documented.
6. ESTABLISH DECEDENT'S IDENTIFICATION

The establishment or confirmation of the decedent's identity is paramount to the death investigation. Proper identification allows notification of the next of kin, settlement of estates, resolution of criminal and civil litigation, and the proper completion of the death certificate. To establish identity, the investigation should document direct visual or photographic identification of the decedent if visually recognizable.

1. DOCUMENT POSTMORTEM CHANGES

The documenting of postmortem changes to the body assists the investigation in explaining body appearance in the interval following death. Inconsistencies between postmortem changes and body location may indicate movement of body and validate or invalidate witness statements. In addition, postmortem changes to the body, when correlated with circumstantial information, can assist the investigators in estimating the approximate time of death.

Prior to moving the body, the investigator should note the presence of each of the following:

1. Description of body temperature (e.g., warm, cold, frozen)
2. Livor (color, location, degree of blanching, Tardieu spots)
3. Rigor (state/intensity, location of the body, broken)
4. Degree of decomposition (putrefaction, adipocere, mummification, skeletonization, as appropriate)
5. Insect or animal activity
6. Scene temperature (document method used and time estimated)
7. Describe the presence of an object or the location of the body that might affect decomposition (e.g., in direct sunlight or near a space heater)
8. SCENE DEBRIEFING

The scene debriefing helps investigators from all participating agencies to establish post-scene responsibilities by sharing data regarding particular scene findings. The scene debriefing provides each agency the opportunity for input regarding special requests for assistance, additional information, special examinations, and other requests requiring interagency communication, cooperation and education.

When participating in scene debriefing, the coroner should:

1. Determine post-scene responsibilities (identification, notification, press releases and note evidence transportation)
2. Determine/identify the need for a specialist (e.g., crime laboratory technicians, social services, entomologists)
3. Communicate with the pathologist regarding the autopsy schedule (as needed)
4. Share investigative data (as required in furtherance of the investigation)
5. Communicate special requests to appropriate agencies, being mindful of the necessity for confidentiality

# AUTOPSIES

The decision to have an autopsy generally falls upon the coroner. Order an autopsy when suspicious or unlawful circumstances surround the death, or when cause is not reasonably determinable. An autopsy is required when:

1. Decedent is less than 19 years of age, unless death is caused by readily recognizable disease or accident AND there are no suspicious circumstances (N.R.S §23-1824)
2. If a child dies suddenly and unexpectedly, and is between 1 week and 3 years old, an autopsy shall be completed (N.R.S §71-605).
3. No cause of death shall be certified as sudden infant death syndrome unless an autopsy, a death scene investigation, and a review of the child’s medical history reveal no other possible cause.
4. CHILD DEATH INVESTIAGATIONS

Child death investigation is covered under specific guidelines. The Nebraska Attorney General has guidelines drafted. (see appendix).

1. DETERMINE NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES (NEXT OF KIN)

Every reasonable effort should be made to notify the next of kin as soon as possible. Notification of next of kin initiates closure for the family, disposition of remains, and facilitates the collection of additional information relative to the case.

1. COMPLETING THE INVESTIGATION
   1. JURISDICTION OVER THE BODY

Maintaining jurisdiction over the body allows the coroner to protect the chain of custody as the body is transported from the scene for examination or storage. If investigation indicates an autopsy is required, the coroner will dispatch the appropriate carrier to remove the remains to the location where an autopsy will be performed. The transporter used will either be the funeral home requested by the next of kin or the on-call funeral home in absence of that decision and can only be summoned by the coroner or at his/her direction. Dispatch of the transporter should be made as soon as the coroner has an estimated time of completion of scene investigation such that the transporter will arrive as close as possible to that time.

When jurisdiction has been terminated in an investigation, the funeral home selected by the next of kin is to be summoned to pick up the remains.

Infectious cases: It is incumbent on the coroner to notify all parties concerned when a case is known to be infectious. This would include the carrier, the funeral home, and any other parties who might have contact with the body.

Prior to releasing the body to an authorized receiving agent or funeral director, it is necessary to determine the person responsible for certification of the death. Information to complete the death certificate includes demographic information and the date, time and location of death.

When releasing jurisdiction over the body, the coroner should:

1. Determine who will sign the death certificate (physician, coroner or pathologist)
2. Confirm the date, time and location of death
3. Release the body to a funeral director or other authorized receiving agent as appropriate

# FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATIONS

The coroner will be responsible for continued investigation on all deaths managed by him/her. Follow-up investigations will be documented as appropriate using forms provided by the coroner's office. Subsequent scene investigations, photography, and interviews with families and/or witnesses will be coordinated with the appropriate law enforcement agency of jurisdiction. New findings affecting the nature of the investigation will be reported immediately to the pathologist. When appropriate, a press release, as well as updated press releases, should be released by the coroner.

The coroner shall notify the primary care provider of that provider's patient's death as soon as possible to both advise the physician and obtain additional information on the decedent.

Subpoena: It will frequently be necessary for the coroner to follow-up on cases by collecting information from various sources. Although many individuals and agencies will provide information that is subsequently summarized and documented by the coroner, a subpoena is sometimes necessary to get documents, records, lab samples and other materials. There is an exception to HIPPAA for coroner's investigations, so that should never be a barrier to obtaining information. (45 CFR 164.512(g) – coroner exception).