



After the Loss of Your Baby

Information About a Post-Mortem (also called an autopsy)

Please note that the information below may be disturbing to some readers.

We are very sorry for the loss of your baby. We understand this is a painful and difficult time.

We are here to support you.

This information is here to guide you. It explains:

- what a post-mortem is
- the choices available to you
- what may happen if you decide to have a post-mortem.

There is no need to decide anything straight away and you should take the time you need.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a post-mortem?

A post-mortem is a medical exam carried out after a baby has died.

It is done by a specialist doctor called a **paediatric and perinatal pathologist**.

The purpose of a post-mortem is to:

- try to understand why your baby died
- help answer any questions you may have
- provide information that may help with future pregnancies.

Sometimes, even after full examination, there may be no clear answer to why your baby died.

Do I have to say yes?

No — this is your choice.

- You may choose yes or no.
- You can ask as many questions as you need.
- You can take time to think about what feels right for you.

Nothing will happen without your permission.

Your baby will always be cared for gently and respectfully at all times.

What does consent mean?

Consent means giving your permission.

If you choose to have a post-mortem:

- a doctor, midwife, or nurse will talk through the process
- you will be asked to sign a consent form
- you can choose the type of post-mortem
- you can decide how any tissues or organs are cared for.

You remain in control of what happens.

Types of Post-Mortem

You can choose the type of examination that feels right for you and your family.

External examination (no incisions)

This is an examination on the outside of your baby's body.

It may include:

- medical photographs
- measurements
- an X-ray of the bones
- examination of the placenta (afterbirth)
- looking carefully at your baby's body.

There are **no surgical cuts made to your baby's body**.

Full post-mortem

This type of examination gives the most information.

It includes:

- surgical cuts to your baby's chest, tummy, and to the back of baby's head, to examine the organs inside your baby's body
- all cuts are carefully stitched closed after the examination.

You will still be able to see and hold your baby afterwards if you wish.

The stitches will not be visible when your baby is dressed.

Limited post-mortem

This means only certain areas of the body are examined/checked. Only small surgical cuts are made.

For example,

- chest only
- tummy only
- head only
- small samples for genetic testing only.

This option may be chosen if:

- a condition has already been identified
- you prefer less testing.

What tests are usually included?

All types of post-mortems will include:

- medical photographs
- measurements
- an X-ray
- examination of the placenta (afterbirth).

What tissue may be taken?

Very small samples of tissue (about the size of a pea) may be taken:

- to be looked at under a microscope
- for genetic testing
- to check for infection.

What happens to the tissue?

- Most tissue is carefully returned to your baby after the examination.
- Some small samples are usually kept on slides or in blocks as part of the medical record.
- Small samples are usually stored (frozen) for possible future testing, especially for genetic reasons.

Stored tissue may be kept for up to **20 years**.

You can choose what you feel comfortable agreeing to.

Are organs kept?

No, unless you give permission.

In some cases, an organ (for example, the brain) may need a little more time to examine. If this is recommended, your doctor will discuss this with you first.

If an organ is kept for a short time, you can choose to:

- wait until it is returned before burial or cremation
- or have a separate burial or cremation later.

What about genetic testing?

Genetic testing looks for conditions that can be passed through families or related to the cause of your baby's death.

A small tissue sample may be taken and frozen, this is your choice.

Genetic testing may:

- help explain what happened
- provide information for future pregnancies.

However, it does not always provide clear answers. Your doctor will talk with you about the possible benefits.

Can tissue be used for research or training?

You can decide whether tissue may be used for:

- medical research
- training healthcare professionals
- quality and safety checks
- improving care for other families.

If tissue is used:

- your baby's name and personal details are removed
- your baby's identity is always protected.

You can say no if this does not feel right for you.

The post-mortem report

After the examination,

- A report is prepared for your doctor.
- This usually takes 6 to 8 weeks.

You can ask for:

- a version written in plain language, using simple words (plain language report).

The report is only sent to the doctor or doctors named in Part 7 of Part 8 of the consent form.

Where does the examination take place?

Your baby will continue to be cared for respectfully by PathWest at King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH).

Your baby is taken to Perth Children's Hospital for the examination and returned to KEMH on the same day.

Who may be present at the examination?

Other healthcare staff may be present during the examination, such as:

- doctors in training
- nurses
- technicians.

This helps ensure high standards of care, learning, and careful review.

Who can support me?

You do not have to go through this alone.

You can speak with:

- your doctor
- your midwife
- the post-mortem coordinator.

They are here to:

- answer your questions
- explain anything that is unclear
- support you through this difficult time.



Scan for more information



Contact PathWest

Hours:

Monday to Friday
7:30am - 3:30pm



0414 930 260



perinatal.pathology@health.wa.gov.au



pathwest.health.wa.gov.au

Location

P Block, King Edward Memorial Hospital
Hensman Road, Subiaco WA 6008

Postal address

P.O. Box 134, Subiaco WA 6904