



**An inquiry into a death  
by the Police and the  
judicial authorities**

**Information  
for relatives**



# Someone close to you has died. We express our condolences to you and your family. Apart from all the emotions, these are challenging and busy times for you. In addition, there is this inquiry into the death.

This brochure contains an explanation as to why the Police, the medical examiner and the Public Prosecutor's Office conduct this inquiry. We can imagine that you may have questions such as: why are the Police conducting an inquiry? What does a medical examiner do? This brochure contains the answers to these questions as well to other frequently asked questions. You can also use this brochure to explain to family or neighbours what has happened.

## What is the reason for an inquiry into a death?

After a death, a medical practitioner seeks to identify the cause of a person's death. It is often a General Practitioner or a physician in attendance who knows the medical history of the deceased. It is the reason why a medical practitioner is able to make an assessment as to whether someone died of an illness, which we refer to as *death from natural causes*. If the physician concerned is not sure as to whether the death is

from natural causes, the physician must transfer the examination to a medical examiner. It is prescribed by law. A medical examiner is specialized in the assessment of the manner of death.

## Who are conducting the examination?

Tactical and forensic investigating officers of the Police conduct the inquiry together with the medical examiner. It is referred to as an inquiry into a death. After the examination, they submit their findings to the Public Prosecutor of the Public Prosecution Service, who has the ultimate responsibility concerning a death which is not due to natural causes.

## Where does the inquiry take place?

The inquiry is generally conducted on the location where the deceased has been found, for instance in a house or outside. However, it is not always possible as a location might not always be suitable. In such event, we transfer the deceased to a mortuary. If the

examination is conducted at the location itself, we will ask you to go elsewhere during the course of the examination.

## What happens during the course of the inquiry?

The inquiry consists of two parts: the examination of the body of the deceased and the investigation of the environment of the deceased. Those carrying out the investigations usually wear protective clothing, such as a white overall, gloves and a face mask.

### *Examination of the body*

The medical examiner examines the body in cooperation with the forensic investigating officers. The medical examiner makes an assessment of the cause of death for which the deceased is generally undressed. The medical examiner may examine a number of things; at times, on the instructions of the Public Prosecutor. In some cases, the medical examiner takes blood and urine samples for the examination of substances, which might have

# What is the procedure of the inquiry into a death?

1

A medical practitioner seeks to establish what the cause of death was. Is it not certain that it is a death from natural causes? The inquiry is subsequently transferred to a medical examiner.



Medical practitioner



Medical examiner



Forensic investigating officer



Tactical investigating officer



Family liaison officer



Public Prosecution Service

2

Investigating officers of the Police together with the medical examiner conduct the inquiry. Their findings are submitted to the Public Prosecution Service.



3

The Public Prosecutor has the ultimate responsibility if the death is not due to natural causes.



Victim Support Netherlands

Do you have any questions afterwards? Contact the family liaison officer, the tactical investigating officer or Victim Support Netherlands.

affected the death, such as drugs and pharmaceuticals. The medical examiner may take a measurement of the body temperature to establish the time of death as accurately as possible. The medical examiner contacts the attending physician or the General Practitioner to obtain information about the health of the deceased and the use of medication.

#### *The investigation of the surroundings*

The medical examiner and the tactical investigating police officers investigate the surroundings of the deceased to be able to reconstruct in the best possible way what happened and what the circumstances were under which your relative died.

During the course of the inquiry, the tactical investigating officers may ask you questions about the private life of your relative. Your answers may help to uncover information as to what happened. You are free to provide any information to the tactical investigating officers and you can ask them questions if you wish.

#### **What are the possible results of the inquiry?**

The inquiry may result in a number of conclusions set out as follows.

*Death from natural causes*  
If the medical examiner and

the Police come to the conclusion that it was a death from natural causes, the inquiry is concluded. The medical examiner provides a death certificate to the Municipality stating that the death was due to natural causes. As a surviving relative you can start to organize the funeral of your relative.

#### *An accident or suicide*

If the medical examiner and the Police consider it a matter of an accident or a suicide, they inform the Public Prosecutor. The Public Prosecutor subsequently decides whether there is a need for a further inquiry or that the inquiry must be concluded. If the inquiry is concluded, you can start to organize the funeral of your relative.

#### *A crime*

Is the Public Prosecutor of the opinion that it concerns a crime? In such event the inquiry becomes a criminal investigation. Further examinations of the body will be carried out, what is referred to as *a judicial post-mortem examination*. The Dutch Forensic Institute will provide you with information. The body

of your relative is not released yet.

#### *Further investigations are needed*

If after the investigations, it is still not clear what was the cause of death of your relative, additional investigations are needed. The body of your relative is generally not released yet.

#### **How am I informed of the results of the inquiry?**

The tactical investigating officers or the medical examiner will discuss the results of the inquiry with you. In the event of death from natural causes, we do not make further inquiries into establishing the exact cause of death.

#### *Autopsy*

Do you wish to know more about the cause of death of your relative? Or do you wish to know if there are any genetic health risks? You may ask an attending physician or the General Practitioner of the deceased for what is referred to as an *autopsy*. An autopsy is an internal and external examination by a pathologist, who is a specialized medical practitioner in hospital. It is

Contact Victim Support Netherlands (*Slachtofferhulp Nederland*) if you need emotional help or support if you have questions to the Police and the judicial authorities. Go to: [slachtofferhulp.nl](https://slachtofferhulp.nl) or call 0900-0101

important to express such a wish promptly. The medical examiner, the attending physician or the General Practitioner may provide advice on the options and the possible costs of such procedures.

### **What happens after the inquiry?**

It may be that the criminal investigators or the medical examiner come across something which you would rather not be faced with. If you wish you can engage the services of a specialized cleaning company. Do not hesitate to ask the criminal investigators or the funeral director if they can be of help to you.

### **Where can I ask questions?**

You may be overwhelmed by the death and the ensuing inquiry. It is therefore understandable that you may no longer recall exactly what has happened. You will be given the contact details of a tactical investigating officer or a family liaison officer. Please contact them to discuss the inquiry or to ask questions you may have. Does it actually concern a crime and has a criminal investigation been instituted? You will be assigned two family liaison officers who will keep you informed of the criminal investigation.

The General Practitioner of the deceased will receive information from the medical examiner. Contact your General Practitioner if you have any medical questions. If you wish to have more information, the General Practitioner can contact the medical examiner.

## **Personal Notes**

# Personal Notes

