

What to do if your child dies at home

This factsheet explains what to do after your child dies if you have been caring for them at home. It is important to be prepared for what needs to happen and to have support of a loved one during this time.

After your child has died, you do not need to do anything in a hurry. If you would like to, you can spend time with your child before calling other people. When you and your family are ready, you will need to phone the care team who have been supporting you at home to let them know your child has died. You should have access to the contact details for the team so that you can contact someone after-hours if needed. Parents often ask if they need to notify the police when their child dies. This is generally not required because the child's death was expected and the result of a progressive illness.

A health professional will come to your house and certify in writing that your child has died. This letter or paperwork is then given to the funeral director. The funeral director can obtain the formal medical certificate at a later time from your doctor.

When you are ready, the funeral director will come to your home. Some families want to keep their child at home for as long as possible before the funeral. Speak to your funeral director about the options to keep your child at home if this is something you would like to do.

Funeral directors are usually very flexible and will come to the house at a time that suits you. They are also on call twenty-four hours a day, but there may be an additional cost for work outside normal hours.

It is important for families to be prepared for what happens if the funeral director comes to your home. For example, it is the policy of some funeral companies to place people who have died into a bag, to comply with Workplace Health and Safety Regulations, before placing them on a stretcher and taking them to the vehicle. If this is the case, you can ask that the bag be left open while your child leaves your home. An alternative would be for someone to carry the child to the funeral director's car and place them on the stretcher at this point. Privacy can also be considered in where the funeral director parks their vehicle so that it is close to the entry of your home.

You may wish for your child's doona to be placed over them or you may want your child to leave with a favourite toy. These special items can be kept for you by the funeral director. When the time comes for you to give your child to the funeral director you may be overwhelmed with emotions. It is important to have the support of loved ones at this time.

If you would like to, you can visit your child at the funeral home before the funeral. Speak to your funeral director if this is something that you would like to do.

Source: Queensland Government 2002, *Palliative Care for Children with Cancer — a Guide for Parents*, Royal Children's Hospital, Brisbane.