



# Death Abroad

*We understand how difficult it is for families and friends when a loved one dies abroad, when grief may be compounded by barriers of foreign language, law and culture. This factsheet offers key information and will help you navigate through the complex process surrounding a death abroad.*

*Whether you are in Canada, or abroad with the deceased, the following information should be taken into consideration. It is usually not necessary for you to travel to the location where the death occurred.*

## First steps when dealing with a death abroad:

- 1) Identify a designated representative** to make decisions for the family, either in Canada or locally. When possible, it is advisable that this person have the required documentation, such as the deceased's will and any power of attorney.
- 2) Notify the travel insurance provider** of the death and ensure that their instructions are followed, to avoid unnecessary delays or complications.
- 3) Identify a funeral home** in the region where the death took place that is experienced in international funeral arrangements. The funeral home will guide you through the next steps and assist with arrangements in both countries, should you wish a funeral in Canada.

## Funeral arrangements (abroad or at home)

Your designated representative will need to **make decisions for the family** regarding the disposition of the remains of the deceased.

The funeral home in the region will advise you on **available options for burial and/or cremation**. For example, cremation is not always available locally and the body may need to be sent to another location to be cremated. In many countries, there are strict time constraints involved in the cremation and burial process. In some locations, facilities for embalming and preparing remains for transportation may be limited or non-existent.

Should you decide to repatriate the remains to Canada, the date of the funeral service should not be confirmed before the remains or ashes have been returned and have cleared **Canadian customs**. Many factors can delay the repatriation of the deceased.

## What to expect

The funeral home in the country where the death occurred may be able to obtain the **official death certificate** and register the death according to local laws.

It is important to understand that each country has different policies and procedures and **local laws apply** following the death of a foreigner in their territory.

In many cases, timelines may be longer than in Canada and **delays could occur** at any stage.

**Airlines have their own regulations** for the repatriation of remains. Family members should not expect to travel on the same plane as the body when the deceased is being repatriated.

## Costs

Repatriating remains back to Canada can be quite costly and, depending on the circumstances of the death, it could be a very long process.

In many cases, the funeral home in the region will require a payment guarantee or payment up-front before any action is taken.

Funeral arrangements abroad are usually less costly; however, local customs and costs associated with interpretation or translation services for a ceremony overseas can add up.

All costs related to a death abroad and the repatriation of remains or ashes are the family's responsibility regardless of the cause of death. Your insurance company may cover the costs directly, or you may be required to make the payments up-front and be reimbursed later.

## Documentation

The primary documentation required by the designated representative will be an **official death certificate** that is issued by local authorities.

- The funeral home in the country where the death occurred may be able to obtain the **official death certificate** and register the death according to local laws.
- It is recommended that you **obtain several copies of the death certificate** as it is required at several stages.
- If the death certificate is not in one of Canada's official languages, it must be **translated into English or French** by a certified translation service.

Circumstances surrounding the death and whether human remains or ashes will be repatriated back to Canada may dictate the need for additional documentation.

- Complex cases where an investigation is ongoing may require a **medical, police or autopsy report and/or toxicology results**.
- In some countries, conducting an **autopsy may be mandatory**.
- A **mortuary passport** may be required to transport remains for cremation in a nearby country should local laws prevent cremation in the country where the death occurred.
- A **cremation certificate** is recommended for ashes being repatriated to Canada. If the body of the deceased is being repatriated, certification that the individual had no communicable diseases may be required for the body to be released to you by Canada Border Services Agency.

## When you need assistance

If you are abroad, contact the nearest **Canadian government office** for assistance. In Canada, contact our **24/7 Emergency Watch and Response Centre** by telephone at +1 613 996 8885 (call collect where available) or email at [sos@international.gc.ca](mailto:sos@international.gc.ca).

Consular officials can help you understand country-specific processes and complete the following steps, if needed:

- acquiring information on the location of the remains and the circumstances surrounding the death;
- obtaining a list of local funeral homes experienced in handling international arrangements;
- getting in touch with the appropriate authorities, such as the police, hospital or morgue; and
- cancelling the Canadian passport of the deceased and obtaining other required services and documentation, such as an autopsy and/or police report, if applicable.

## Related links

- Global Affairs Canada: [Death Abroad](#)
- Service Canada: [Following a death](#)
- Canada Border Services Agency: [Importation and Exportation of Human Remains and Other Human Tissues](#)
- Canadian Air Transport Security Authority: [Cremated Remains](#)