The Post Mortem Examination Report

Following the post mortem examination, the Pathologist writes a detailed report for the Doctor who cared for you and your baby detailing his/her findings.

An initial report will generally be available within 2 or 3 working days, and a final report will be issued within 6 weeks, when all test results are known. The information gained from this report will allow your health care professional to counsel you if your baby has a genetic condition, or discuss why the baby died and what the risks are for future pregnancies. We can also prepare a plain language report for you in non-technical language for discussion with your GP, Obstetrician, Neonatologist or Clinical Genetic Counsellor. A plain language report can be requested when signing the post mortem examination consent form.

Who Can Advise Me?

The Post Mortem Coordinator or your Doctor will be able to discuss all issues of post mortem examinations with you.

Do I Have To Make Any Decisions Right Now?

No. If you wish you can retain this brochure and the consent form and discuss any aspect of these services with the Post Mortem Coordinator or your Doctor. It is important to reach decisions you are comfortable with and we understand that this may take some time.

No examination of your baby will be done without your consent.

What Else Can Perinatal Pathology Do For Me?

The Department of Perinatal Pathology has a Quiet Room for you, your family (and other people important to you) to spend time with your baby, when you have left Hospital. The quiet room is available Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm whether or not your baby has had or is going to have a post mortem examination. Access to the Quiet Room can be arranged by phoning the Perinatal Pathology Department on 9340 2730.

The Perinatal Pathology staff also prepare mementos of your baby, including hand and foot prints and photographs, which are available by phoning Perinatal Pathology on 9340 2730.

Liaison will also occur between our Department, Pastoral Care Services and the Social Work Department as necessary, to integrate services in relation to funeral planning. This may include such things as liaison with a Funeral Director of your choice, or transport of your baby’s body to country or remote areas of Western Australia.

Who Can I Contact For More Information?

For more information please contact the:

Post Mortem Coordinator
Perinatal Pathology Department
King Edward Memorial Hospital
374 Bagot Road
SUBIACO, WA 6008

Telephone: (08) 9340 2730
Facsimile: (08) 9340 2636

Please note that KEMH is a tertiary teaching hospital and photographs, diagnostic slides or knowledge gained during a post mortem examination may be used anonymously for teaching of clinicians or authorised students.

Non-Coronial Post Mortem Examinations

Information for Parents

At King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH), we recognise that the loss of your baby will be a sad time and we are committed to supporting and caring for you and your family. The death of your baby may raise important questions that can affect your grief as well as have implications for future pregnancies.

The decision to have an internal examination of your baby’s body can be a difficult decision and may be influenced by some people wanting to protect you from further emotional pain by advising against it. Research and our experiences show that some parents have later regretted not having the information that a post mortem examination may provide, whereas rarely do parents regret having this information.

It is important to know that such an examination will not compromise either your ongoing contact with your baby nor any pastoral, spiritual or religious needs related to your baby.

The following information is provided so that you are well informed to make your decision and know the options available to you.

What Is A Post Mortem Examination?

This is an examination performed after death to provide as much information as possible to explain what happened to your baby and why. An examination can only be done with your consent.
Who Does the Examination?

At KEMH, post mortem examinations are performed by medical specialists known as Perinatal Pathologists who have experience and training specifically in the area of baby post mortems.

Where Does the Examination Take Place?

Post mortem examinations are performed in the Perinatal Pathology Department at KEMH which is specially designed and equipped for baby post mortems.

What Actually Happens?

Your baby is transferred to the Perinatal Pathology Department at KEMH. Measurements and photographs are taken of your baby to create a permanent record. Where consent for a post mortem examination has been given an X-ray of your baby is done to assess bone development.

At the time of the examination the Pathologist does a full external examination and, if you have given consent, then looks inside your baby’s body. Each organ is examined, weighed and a small piece is taken of each organ for microscopic examination. These small pieces are kept indefinitely to create a permanent record. The placenta is also examined at this time.

After the examination all the organs are returned and, as in an operation, the skin surfaces are carefully sewn together.

What Choices Are Available To Me?

It is entirely up to you to decide the degree of examination that you give permission for the Pathologist to perform. This may be an external examination with or without other investigations, an examination of a specific area or organ or a full post mortem examination. The examination will be tailored precisely to your wishes; these should be written on the signed consent form so that the Pathologist knows exactly what is required, but also what is not permitted.

What are the Types of Examinations?

1. Full Post Mortem Examination – this will allow the Pathologist to give a very detailed report of any external or internal abnormalities, organ growth, and structural defects. The face, limbs and hands are never cut. To examine the abdominal and chest organs, an incision, which can be likened to you or I having surgery, is made from the clavicle to just past the umbilicus (belly button). To examine the brain, a small cut is made at the back of the head; these incisions are not normally visible later when your baby is lying dressed in a cot because all cuts are fully repaired.

2. Limited Post Mortem Examination – this is where there are restrictions placed on the examination. For example, examination of the abdominal and chest organs but no head incisions or examine chest organs only or examine abdominal organs only in addition to an external, x-ray and placenta examination.

3. External Examination Only – this is where the outside of your baby’s body, x-ray and placental examinations only take place. No cuts are made and no internal organs are studied.

4. Step-Wise Examination – As parents, you can say what limits you want put on the examination, but include permission for the Pathologist to examine other areas if the initial findings suggest there may be abnormalities elsewhere. For example, if you choose a step-wise examination after a condition mainly affecting the abdomen, the Pathologist will examine the abdomen, and only examine the chest if he/she finds clear suggestions that the condition has affected the chest too.

The more complete the examination, the more information the final report will contain. The more information the doctor or counsellor involved with your care receives, the better they will be able to explain what has happened to your baby and whether this could affect future pregnancies or other family members.

All these options will be discussed with you.

What About Other Tests?

Cytogenetic, microbiology, virology or other laboratory tests may be very informative on occasion, by detecting infection or genetic problems, and small specimens will be sent for tests if the Pathologist thinks it necessary at the time of the post mortem examination. The results of these additional tests are included in the final report.

Keeping Organs

We have a formal written policy that whole organs are never kept without the specific consent of the parents. However it is vital to realise that some organs such as the brain can not be examined satisfactorily without chemical treatment (“fixation”) and that without this examination the amount of information provided will be reduced.

If permission has been granted and an organ has been retained for fixation the options include:
1) to delay cremation or burial until examination is complete (this may take up to a week)
2) to proceed with cremation or burial and have a separate interment later.

This is entirely up to you to decide; the Post Mortem Coordinator or your Doctor will be able to offer advice.