



The Post Mortem Examination Report

Following an examination, the Pathologist writes a detailed report for the doctor who cared for you and your child 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 child has a genetic condition, or discuss why your child died and what, if any, risks there are for future pregnancies. We can also prepare a *plain language report* for you in non-technical language for discussion with your GP, Paediatrician, Neonatologist or Clinical Genetic Counsellor.

Who Can Advise Me On What I Should Do?

The **Post Mortem Coordinator, your Doctor or registered nurse (RN)** 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, your Doctor or registered nurse (RN)**. It is important to reach decisions you are comfortable with and we understand that this may take some time.

Nothing will be done without your consent.

What Else Can the Hospital Do For My Child?

Princess Margaret Hospital has a Quiet Room for you, your family (and other people important to you) to spend time with your child, even after you have left the Hospital. The quiet room is available Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm whether or not your child has had a post mortem examination. Access can be arranged by your child's nursing staff or by the social work department.

In addition, liaison will also occur between our Department, Pastoral Care Services and the Social Work Department and 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 child's body to country or remote areas of the State.

Who Can I Contact For More Information?

Post Mortem Coordinator
Paediatric Pathology Department
Princess Margaret Hospital
Roberts Road
SUBIACO, WA 6008

Telephone: (08) 9340 8619
Facsimile: (08) 9340 8552

Please note that PMH 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 Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH), we recognise that the loss of your child is a sad time and we, as a Hospital, are committed to supporting and caring for you and your family as fully as possible. The death of your child may raise significant and important questions that can affect your grief as well as have implications for the future.

The decision to have an internal examination of your child's body is 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 may provide, whereas rarely do parents regret having this information.

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

The following information is detailed so that you may be well informed about your decision and the various 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 child and why.

Who Does the Examination?

At PMH, the post mortem examinations are performed by a team of medical specialists (Paediatric Pathologists) who have experience and training specifically in the area of paediatric post mortems.

What Actually Happens?

Your child is taken to the Paediatric Pathology Department at PMH, which is specially designed and equipped for paediatric post mortems.

At the time of the examination the Pathologist does a full external examination and, if you have approved, then looks inside your child's body. Each of the individual organs is examined, weighed and very small pieces are taken for microscopic examination, which are kept indefinitely to create a permanent record.

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 Parents?

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. 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 Post Mortems?

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 and hands are never incised.** Incisions are made in discreet locations on your child's body and allow the Pathologist to examine internal organs. The incisions can be likened to you or I having surgery and are repaired to the same standard upon completion of the examination. To examine the abdominal and chest organs, the incision that is made is from the upper chest to just past the umbilicus and to examine the brain, an incision is made at the back of the head.

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 examination.

3. External Examination Only – this is where the outside of your child's body, and x-ray 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 child and whether this could affect future pregnancies or other family members.

All these options will be discussed with you.

What About Other Studies?

Genetic, microbiology or virology and 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 worthwhile at the time of the post mortem. The results of these are included in the final report.

Keeping Organs

We have a formal written policy that **whole organs are never kept without the specific permission 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 a week or so)
- 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.