FIRST 48 HOURS AFTER A DEATH IN THE HOSPITAL

A planning checklist you can fill in ahead of time, or use as a guide in the moment. Hospitals and states do not all follow the same steps. This is not medical or legal advice.

The first hour

A doctor or another person in authority will officially pronounce the death. That record is what makes a death certificate possible later. You can ask for a few minutes, and you can ask if a faith leader or other people should come before the person is moved.

- ☐ Ask for a quiet room and a few minutes with the person
- ☐ Tell staff about any faith or family custom we want honored now
- ☐ Ask staff to wait, if we can, until named people arrive
- ☐ Write down the time of death if we are told, and the staff person we are working with:

  _____
- ☐ If we are asked about an autopsy, say yes, no, or that we need to talk first

Source: National Institute on Aging, "What to Do After Someone Dies," nia.nih.gov (accessed Nov. 13, 2026).

Who to call

Who	Name	Phone	Call first?
Funeral home			
Family			
Faith leader			
Close friend / other			

Who will meet the funeral home: _____ **Phone:** _____

QUESTIONS, BELONGINGS, AND PAPERS

What the hospital may ask

Staff often ask a short set of questions. Hospitals do not all ask the same things, or in the same order. These six come up often. They are one part of a larger plan, not the whole plan.

1. Which funeral home should we call? _____
2. Is this person an organ or tissue donor? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure Where recorded: _____
3. Who is next of kin, or who has the say? _____
4. What about personal things (rings, glasses, wallet, phone, hearing aids)?
5. Who is this person's doctor? _____
6. Who else should come before the person is moved? _____

Writing a name as next of kin does not create legal authority. Donor wishes should match what the person registered, when that applies. Source: organdonor.gov, "Donation After Life" (accessed Nov. 13, 2026).

In the first two days, and papers to gather

- ☐ Confirm the funeral home has been called, and when pickup will happen
- ☐ Collect personal things from the hospital and make a short list
- ☐ Ask the funeral home to help with the death certificate, and how many certified copies to order
- ☐ Ask whether the funeral director will report the death to Social Security. If they will not, a family member needs to do that as soon as possible
- ☐ Tell close family, and find the will, insurance, and account list. Do not write full account numbers on this page

Many offices will only accept a **certified copy** of the death certificate. Get copies from the vital records office in the state where the death occurred, or ask the funeral home to order them. You will often need several copies for Social Security, banks, life insurance, and a pension.

We may need certified copies for: _____

Sources: USA.gov, "How to get a certified copy of a death certificate" and "Agencies to notify when someone dies"; CDC / NCHS, "Where to Write for Vital Records"; National Institute on Aging, "What to Do After Someone Dies" (all accessed Nov. 13, 2026).

The full chapter, plus the medicine list, the doctors, and where the papers are kept, lives in The Family Care Binder at getfamilycareplans.com. This checklist is for personal and family use. Please do not resell it.