

Patient information

A guide for parents wishing to take their baby's body home

We are sorry to hear that your baby has died and would like to offer our support at this time. There are many decisions to be made at this sad time and you may be considering whether to take your baby home before their cremation or burial. The following information is given so that you are aware and understand the choices open to you.

Can I take my baby home?

It may be important for you to take your baby home allowing you time together quietly and privately with family and friends. You can take your baby home directly from the ward or hospital mortuary once any legal documentation has been completed. If a post mortem examination is to be arranged you will be unable to take your baby home directly from the ward however, you can arrange to have your baby at home after this has been completed.

How do I take my baby home?

Your baby can be transported in your own car. You may wish to carry your baby in your arms, use a Moses basket, a casket obtained from a funeral director or one that you have made yourself. However, consideration should be given to the gestational age of your baby and fragility of their body when deciding how to take them home. Alternately you may wish to use the services of a funeral director to bring your baby home; there may be a charge for this service.

Will I need to sign any forms?

Before leaving the hospital, you will be asked to sign a form stating that you are taking your baby home and will be arranging their burial or cremation. There is no legal requirement for a funeral service to be held, but the law requires that babies who are stillborn or die after birth are buried or cremated.

If your baby was stillborn or died following birth, you will be given a Certificate of Stillbirth or Neonatal Death Certificate and will need to contact the Registrar's Office to register your baby's death. Details of the Registrar's offices can be found at the end of the leaflet.

At home

When you are at home, the room that your baby will be in needs to be kept cool and well ventilated. A cold cot may be hired or borrowed to keep your baby in. The length of time that your baby is at home with you will depend on your own wishes. Some parents have their baby at home the day or night before the burial or cremation, and for others, a longer period is needed. You should be aware that the appearance of your baby's skin may change during this time.

Where can I bury my baby?

If you are considering a burial for your baby, there are alternatives to burial in a cemetery. There are many different types of funerals, dependent on your beliefs and values. Although burial mainly happens in purpose designed cemeteries or churchyards, there has been an increase in the number of burials in privately owned land, such as gardens or farmland.

You may wish to bury your baby in your own garden, or in some other place (in the countryside, for example) that holds a special meaning for you. There are also privately-owned woodland burial sites if you did not wish to bury in your own land or in the local cemetery.

We recommend that you consult the Environment Agency and your Environmental Health Department of your local authority for any queries you may have on the proposed burial plot.

The following are some of the conditions that the Environment Agency would expect to be met:

- It is essential that you obtain permission to complete a burial where you are not the land owner of the ground involved. If there is any doubt over ownership you should contact HM Land Registry, to check who is the registered land owner.
- Your baby must be wrapped or buried in environmentally, biodegradable material (plastic containers etc must not be used). The knitted blanket that your baby is wrapped in is 100% biodegradable.
- There must be no danger to water courses or supplies and there must be no danger of bodily products leaking onto adjoining land.

- The plot has at least one metre of subsoil below its base, with at least one metre of soil to cover the casket.
- The burial site should not be within 10 metres of any standing or running water, or 50 metres of a well, borehole or spring that supplies water for human consumption.
- There should be no objections from other agencies, such as the local council.

It is advisable to record the burial on the deeds of the property and advise any potential future homeowners of the burial site.

Contact information

Bereavement support

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Bereavement Support at the West Suffolk Hospital, telephone 01284 713410 (Monday to Friday, 10.00am to 4.00pm).

Bury St Edmunds Registry Office

Tel: 0345 607 2060

Email: bury.registrars@suffolk.gov.uk

HM Land Registry

Tel: 0300 006 0411

www.landregistry.gov.uk

References

- The Natural Death Centre www.naturaldeath.org.uk
Arranging a funeral/private land burial
- SANDS
Pregnancy loss and the death of a baby
Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society
- Maternity guidelines: Following Delivery of a Non-Viable Foetus (February 2016 - MAT0177)
- Environment Agency www.environment-agency.gov.uk
Funeral practices and the environment.
Meeting the needs of families and the environment.