

Dying at home

FAQs

**What to do when
someone dies at
home, when the
death is expected**

St Raphael's

Your Local Hospice



What should I do when my loved one dies at home?

Even if you have been expecting your loved one's death, when it actually happens, it can be distressing. You may never have seen someone who has died and you may feel quite shocked. Knowing what practical steps to take may help you feel less overwhelmed.

Do I need to do anything such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)/ chest compressions or rescue breaths?

No. If the death is expected, a decision has been made by the healthcare team that CPR would not be an effective treatment for your loved one and that instead we should allow for a natural death.

Do I need to call anyone immediately?

No. If the death is expected, there is no need to call anyone immediately. You do not need to call 999 for an ambulance.

There is no rush, take the time you need to say goodbye to your loved one. You may just wish to sit at the bedside for a period of time. If it is the middle of the night, it is fine to wait until the morning before contacting the clinical team. Once you are ready, you should contact your GP surgery to let them know that your loved one has died. At night and over the weekend you should call 111 or the District Nurses to inform them about the death. They will advise you as to who is available to come to the house to verify the death.

How will I know that the death is 'expected'?

An expected death is where the cause of death is known and the doctors or nurses caring for your loved one feel that they may die soon.

Some expected deaths happen after a recognised dying phase, where someone becomes weaker over time, sleeps more and finally loses consciousness, giving families time to prepare and say goodbye. Some people may die more suddenly, overnight in their sleep for example.

What is meant by verification of death?

After someone dies, a healthcare professional needs to see your loved one to check that there are no signs of life and to confirm that they have died. This involves checking that there are no heart or breath sounds, no pulse and no pupil reaction to light. This is the point in time that is taken as the official date and time of death.

Who can verify a death at home?

This can vary depending on your area but may be a GP from your surgery, an out of hours GP at the weekend, or a community healthcare professional or nurse who has received the necessary training.

Will I have to wait long for someone to come to the house to verify the death?

Unfortunately, there are times when it may take a number of hours for someone to come to the house to confirm that your loved one has died.

While you are waiting, do whatever feels right for you. Some people may prefer to leave the room where their loved one is, while others may wish to remain at the bedside. You may wish to call family or friends to support you while you wait.

What happens after the death has been verified?

Once the death has been verified, you can contact your chosen funeral director to come and collect your loved one. Most funeral directors have a 24-hour telephone helpline for you to call.

Can I wash my loved one after they have died?

Some cultures carry out specific rituals and practices after someone's death. It's important for you to do whatever you feel is right. Some families like to carefully wash their loved one. They might also close their loved one's eyes and support their mouth to stay closed (a soft rolled towel placed under the chin can help to do this). If you prefer, you can ask a funeral director to wash and dress your loved one.

References: Practical things to do after a death, Cancer Research UK online: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping/dying-with-cancer/after-someone-dies/practical-things-to-do>

For next steps, including collecting the death certificate and registering the death, please see our 'Advice and support before and after a bereavement' patient information booklet.



**For further
assistance
and advice**

Contact us

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