

Hospital and Nursing Home Guide For Terminal/Deceased Patients of the Jewish Faith

This guide has been developed by the Sydney Chevra Kadisha (Jewish Burial Society) in order to assist you with terminal or deceased patients of the Jewish Faith.

The Sydney Chevra Kadisha is the ONLY Jewish religious (not-for-profit) organisation that provides mortuary and funeral services for people of the Jewish faith in NSW. As we all care for the deceased and their family, it is extremely important in the Jewish faith, that special procedures are followed prior to and post death.

According to our faith, humans are created in the image of God, and thus possess dignity and sanctity. As the soul is housed in the body, the body retains the sanctity it held while alive, even as the soul departs. The deceased is still a person and all respect should be given the person.

Although at death the soul is not attached to the body, at this time it continues to hover close by. The soul experiences pain as it lets go and leaves this world. At the same time the soul realises with increased clarity and awareness as it distances itself from the body and moves closer to God (the source of souls).

It is therefore very important not to delay, and in fact hasten the process of burial of the deceased in order to help comfort the soul and begin the mourning period for the family.

Prior to Death

1. During the last few moments of life it is appropriate that the person not be left alone and that relatives of the patient are present with the patient (unless they have uncontrollable emotions or are physically ill). This shows respect and honour in the watching over the person as they pass from this world to the next.
2. Family and friends should be encouraged to say Psalms and Prayers for the patient.
3. If possible, the family should be advised to contact the patient's Rabbi in order to assist the patient with special final prayers, and instructions to the family.

Immediately After Death

1. Following positive determination of death, the next of kin should be notified if they are not present.
2. Organise the Medical Cause of Death or Life Extinction certificate ASAP, as Jewish burials need to be arranged ASAP.
3. Once the certificate has been issued, please contact the Sydney Chevra Kadisha (as per the deceased's final wishes or the next of kin instructions) in order to arrange for the transportation of the deceased to the Sydney Chevra Kadisha.
4. The eyes and mouth of the deceased should be closed, either by family or friend if present, or by staff if others not available. A towel or other material may be placed under the chin to keep the mouth closed, or a bandage or other material could be tied under the chin and over the head to ensure the mouth remains closed.
5. A Name Tag is to be placed on the wrist of the deceased ideally, or an alternative place if not possible on wrist.
6. If possible and there is room available, the deceased should be positioned so that their feet face the doorway of the room. When moving from the room, the deceased should be removed feet first.
7. If possible, the window of the deceased room should be opened.
8. The deceased should be left clothed and should not be unnecessarily touched or moved – except for the following:
 - The deceased should be maintained in a straight position
 - a) Adjust the bed so that the body is flat
 - b) The body should be straightened if it is in an awkward position (by touching through the bed linen).
 - c) The arms should be placed straight by side of the body (not across the body)

- d) Remove all pillows from around the body, but leave one pillow under the head.
 - e) Cover the whole body and head of the deceased with a plain sheet without any religious emblems.
 - f) If possible, disconnect all tubes and catheters from their source, or if not possible, they should be cut (except for Coroner's case).
 - g) Any incisions should be dressed (except in Coroner's Case)
9. Do not remove any clothing.
 10. Do not wash the deceased; the Chevra Kadisha will do that.
 11. Do not remove false teeth from the mouth. If the false teeth are not in the mouth they should accompany the deceased (as they will be buried with the deceased).
 12. The family should remove any loose jewellery if not too difficult. Any jewellery left on the deceased will be removed by the Chevra Kadisha and returned to the family.
 13. Following departure from their room and family, the deceased should be placed in a body bag (if available), then placed in the Mortuary (if available).

It is important that immediately after passing, the deceased is not left alone. If possible, and are available, Family and friends should remain with the deceased to say special Psalms. They are able to discharge their duty by remaining with the deceased until removal of the deceased by the Sydney Chevra Kadisha.

Issuing of the Medical Cause of Death Certificate

It is important that the Doctor issues a Medical Cause of Death Certificate immediately to enable the Sydney Chevra Kadisha to pick up the deceased. This will also save nursing staff and others trying to find the Doctor afterwards to obtain a certificate, as a lack of Certificate will delay the burial.

A Life Extinction certificate (Interim Medical Certificate) can be provided by the Registered Nurse to hasten the process of preparing the deceased for burial. In this case, the Registered Nurse will need to provide the details (Name and Contact Number) of the Doctor that will issue the Medical Cause of Death Certificate. The Medical Cause of Death Certificate will need to be provided by the Doctor as soon as possible as the burial cannot take place until this Certificate is obtained.

Autopsy

Jewish Law prohibits any procedure which will cause any damage to the body after death – this is considered a desecration of the body. Routine Autopsy is forbidden. Under no circumstances should the family be asked to authorise an autopsy.

Should an autopsy be requested, contact the Sydney Chevra Kadisha immediately for advice.

Under legislation (Coronial Services Act – Section 29), objections to an autopsy may be made. The Sydney Chevra Kadisha will in such cases lodge objections to an autopsy and, when necessary, apply to the Supreme Court for an Injunction and Decision. Many times, a limited autopsy will suffice the legal requirements.

In cases where an autopsy is required, the entire autopsy should be performed in a body pouch.

1. The autopsy should be performed with as minimal as possible damage to body:
 - a) Avoid incision whenever possible.
 - b) Samples for pathology should be as small as possible
2. All organs should be replaced in their proper place
3. All instruments should be wiped clean with a cloth and the cloth should be placed in the body pouch
4. Suture all incisions as tightly and leak-proof as possible.
5. All blood or articles of clothing containing blood that are not needed for pathological or evidence purposes should be sent along with the remains to the Sydney Chevra Kadisha
6. It is important to emphasize that the body needs to be carefully sewn up again.
7. It is preferable that any autopsies required be done in the least invasive manner eg, blood test, x-ray, scans, etc.

In all instances, every effort should be made to expedite the release of the body as quickly as possible.

Amputations

Where amputations or parts of the body are removed for surgical reasons, eg, limbs and/or organs, such parts must be retained and the Sydney Chevra Kadisha advised. The Sydney Chevra Kadisha will arrange for the collection and burial in accordance with Jewish Law.

Stillborn and Foetus Expiry

With regards to stillborn, non-viable premature births and foetuses of children, the Sydney Chevra Kadisha should be contacted and they will arrange for the collection and burial in accordance with Jewish Law.

Sabbath (Saturday) and Jewish Holidays

The Sydney Chevra Kadisha provides a service 24 hours a day seven days a week. On Sabbath (Saturday) and Jewish Holidays the Sydney Chevra Kadisha's Office is closed however, our telephone will be answered and a representative will attend punctually to arrange for the immediate removal of the deceased. Relatives of the deceased should be told that the Sydney Chevra Kadisha will be informed about the case and that we shall contact them at the conclusion of the Sabbath (or Jewish Festival) in order to make the appropriate funeral arrangements.

For spiritual care and counselling services the Sydney Chevra Kadisha can assist in providing Rabbis and professional trained persons to attend and assist those in need.