



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Bereavement Information for Switzerland & Liechtenstein

Prepared by

British Embassy Consular Section Berne

www.gov.uk/world/switzerland

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INTRODUCTION

The death of a relative or a friend can be a traumatic experience. When the death occurs overseas, family and friends in the UK can feel additional distress as they are unfamiliar with foreign procedures and perhaps are unable to communicate in the language of the country where the death occurred. Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our Embassy in Switzerland are ready to help as far as they can. You may be uncertain about what to do next or who to contact for advice. These notes are designed to help you through the practical arrangements you will need to make.

STANDARD PROCEDURES

In the tragic event of the death of a British National in Switzerland/Liechtenstein a post-mortem may be ordered by a judge or the Public Prosecutor (DE: Staatsanwalt / FR: Procureur / IT: Procuratore) of the area in which the death occurs. They are not usually carried out in the case of a death by natural causes or in the case of unnatural death where a doctor can certify the cause of death on the strength of an external examination. If this is the case, once the body of your next of kin has been released, it is possible to arrange for him or her to be repatriated.

More information about the processes can be found at www.ch.ch/en/death/

Things you can do

Make sure you have as much documentation as possible about the deceased and yourself including the following that can be found in the British passport:

- Full name
- Date and place of birth
- Passport number
- Where and when the passport was issued
- If it is not you – details of the next of kin (NOK) of the deceased

What we can do

- Inform next-of-kin and keep them informed. Ensure that you do not feel you are on your own
- Advise on the cost of local burial, local cremation and transport of the remains and personal property back to the UK
- Provide a list of funeral directors. If an English-speaking firm is not available, Consular staff will help you with the arrangements

What we cannot do

- Investigate an alleged crime
- Pay for burial or cremation expenses
- Pay for the repatriation of remains to the UK
- Pay any outstanding debts

REPATRIATION

When a relative or friend dies overseas you will need to appoint either an International or a local funeral director that will make arrangements to bring the body back to the UK or arrange a local burial or cremation. We will be able to supply you with a local list as well as international undertakers.

If you are travelling with a tour group the first thing you should do is contact them. They will be able to contact the British Embassy or friends and relatives back home on your behalf. If you have no tour representative then you, or someone with you, should contact us and ask for advice.

If the deceased has private insurance cover the insurance company should be informed immediately. **It is the responsibility of the insurance company to appoint a funeral director.** Local companies who approach you should be told to contact your insurers.

The body will have to travel in a lead-lined coffin, which is provided by the funeral director. Relatives are not required to accompany the body, which can travel in the luggage hold. The deceased's Birth Certificate (Marriage Certificate, Divorce papers or proof of the individual's current civil status and residence) and passport will have to be produced before a final Swiss/Liechtenstein Death Certificate (which will be needed for official purposes, such as insurance claims, etc.) can be issued. However, it is normally possible for a provisional Death Certificate to be issued which enables repatriation to take place and the documents can be sent at a later stage. The funeral director will be able to assist with these matters.

The only documents required for the body to be repatriated are the Swiss/Liechtenstein Death Certificate (DE: Sterbeurkunde / FR: Acte de décès / IT: Certificato di morte) and the Corpse Transport Permit (DE: Leichenpass / FR: Permit de transport du corps / IT: Lasciapassare mortuario), both of which will be obtained by the funeral director.

It is important to note that a Swiss/Liechtenstein Death Certificate does not give the cause of death, as this is considered to be confidential. It is given in the report of the doctor, who certifies the death and, of course, in the post-mortem report, if there is one.

CREMATION IN SWITZERLAND/LIECHTENSTEIN AND RETURN OF ASHES TO THE UK

The procedures can vary from region to region and if you are thinking of arranging a local cremation, please contact the British Embassy or the Swiss Consular desk at the FCO in London who will be able to advise you on the procedures in your particular area. Once a body has been released for burial by the Swiss or Liechtenstein authorities, cremation can be organised by the funeral director appointed. He/she can collect the ashes and have them sent by air, which is expensive, or by land, which is considerably cheaper. It is, however, possible for family members to take the ashes back to the UK with them. The crematorium will probably require a letter, stating that in the UK family members can dispose of the ashes of the deceased, as they wish. After cremation, the authorities will issue a document (DE: Einäscherungsurkunde / FR: Acte de crémation / IT: Certificato di cremazione) which together with the Death Certificate you will need to carry with the ashes.

LOCAL BURIAL

If next of kin choose to proceed with a local burial, they will need to instruct a local funeral director. Consular staff in the British Embassy can provide a list of local and international funeral directors on request, including indications of costs. If an English speaking firm is not available, consular staff can assist you by helping with communication of your wishes to a local firm of funeral directors.

POST-MORTEM/AUTOPSY

In the case of a natural death an autopsy will be carried out only at the request of the next of kin. In this case no body parts or organs will be retained without their permission.

In the case of an unnatural death where an autopsy has been ordered small blood and/or tissue samples can be removed and retained without the permission of the next of kin.

If an entire organ or organs is/are removed they will normally be returned before the body is released for burial. In exceptional circumstances, body parts may be retained without permission, but only if further investigation is deemed necessary. If this happens, the next of kin will be informed.

Once the post-mortem has been completed, the body will be released and can be repatriated.

Autopsies are only carried out when there is police involvement in the case. Next of kin can apply for a copy of the report from the Public Prosecutor.

In some cases it may be necessary to have a further autopsy in the UK even though one has been carried out overseas, and when repatriation is to England or Wales, it is probable that the coroner will wish to hold an inquest.

MORTUARY FACILITIES

Facilities in Switzerland are of a similar standard to the UK.

INQUESTS

If the circumstances of the death were not unusual, registration of the death is permitted and the remains will be released for repatriation, burial or cremation within a few hours. However, if an examiner is not satisfied after a preliminary examination of the facts, a post-mortem may be required. Further investigations and interviews with witnesses may also be called for before a decision is made as to cause of death.

If death was caused by a criminal act, the police will be ordered to conduct a full investigation. A decision on whether to prosecute or not can delay the release of the body for burial, cremation or repatriation.

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Access to information concerning a death is restricted until a Coroner has reviewed the evidence such as post-mortem and police reports. The Swiss authorities will usually not provide this information directly to next of kin, or to third parties, including our Consulates, until after the conclusion of the preliminary investigation. The release of any information will usually take several months and in some more complicated instances, years.

ORGAN DONATION / MEDICAL SCIENCE

In Switzerland, the Federal Act on the Transplantation of Organs, Tissues and Cells (Bundesgesetz über die Transplantation von Organen, Geweben und Zellen (Transplantationsgesetz)) came into force on 1 July 2007. The Act put an end to the legal fragmentation that had until then prevailed in the area of transplantation medicine, by providing a uniform and comprehensive legal framework. Like Germany, Switzerland applies the extended consent solution, i.e. legal removal of organs, cells or tissue requires consent of the donor prior to their death. In cases where the person has not made a declaration regarding organ donation, the next of kin shall be asked to give consent. Another prerequisite is the determination of brain death. It is prohibited to grant or to derive financial profit or any other advantage from the donation of human organs, tissue or cells, to trade in human organs, tissue or cells, or to remove or to transplant human organs, tissue or cells which have been obtained in exchange for payment or by granting advantages.

RETURN OF PERSONAL EFFECTS

Next of kin can come over and collect or appoint a lawyer to arrange this. In case of non-residents with minimal effects the international undertaker will often send the items with the body/ashes.

POLICE / JUDICIAL INQUIRIES

In the case of a suspicious death or road traffic accident, the Police prepare a report for the Public Prosecutor.

COMPENSATION

Victims of crime may benefit from compensation from the state. Please contact Victim Support in the particular canton in which the incident occurred. For further help and advice, please consult a lawyer.

LEGAL AID

Legal aid is available and can be applied for by a lawyer.

UK CORONERS

The Coroner in England and Wales is obliged in law to hold an inquest into the cause of any unnatural or violent death of a person whose remains physically lie in his or her area, even if the death occurred overseas and a post-mortem has already been carried out before repatriation of the remains to the UK. In some countries the cause of death is not given on the death certificate and Coroners do not generally have access to judicial files from other countries. Consequently Coroners may order a second post mortem (i.e subsequent to the first post mortem carried out abroad), as part of the inquest

and it is at this stage that families are made aware that organs have been removed and not replaced.

Coroners can request copies of post-mortem and police reports from the Swiss/Liechtenstein authorities. However, these will only be provided once any judicial proceedings are completed. In some instances this can take many months.

In Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) deals with the investigation of all sudden, suspicious, accidental, unexpected and unexplained deaths which occur in Scotland. However, the COPFS does not have the jurisdiction to investigate deaths that occur outside Scotland apart from in a few limited circumstances. Generally, those circumstances include terrorism, cases where the death may have been caused in Scotland but the person died outside Scotland and cases where the death was as a result of murder or culpable homicide caused by another British citizen or subject.

Coroners in Northern Ireland are not obliged to hold an inquest into cause of death. However, next of kin can apply for a judicial review if no inquest is held.

There will be no Coroner's inquest when the remains are buried or cremated locally.

REGISTRATION OF THE DEATH

Registrars require parents/spouse names, religion of deceased, date of marriage (if applicable) and often documentary evidence of birth, marriage, divorce and residence, before they will register the death. Once the necessary documents are produced an international death certificate will be issued. Swiss/Liechtenstein death certificates do not give details of the cause of death, as would be the case in the UK.

There is no legal requirement for you to register the death of a British national in Switzerland and Liechtenstein with UK authorities. The locally issued certificates should be sufficient for all purposes.

The process of registering deaths of British nationals in Switzerland and Liechtenstein will be carried out in a central registration unit in the UK, and no longer at the British Embassy in Berne.

For further information please visit our website: www.gov.uk/register-a-death/y/overseas

Alternatively you can contact:

Consular Overseas Residents Services Unit
Room K4.9
King Charles Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AH
Email: bmdenquiries@fco.gov.uk

WHEN YOU RETURN TO THE UK

You will be able to find help and support from:

- Your family doctor
- The Social Services
- Cruse Bereavement Care

BRITISH PASSPORT CANCELLATION

In order to avoid identity fraud a deceased person's passport should be sent to the British Embassy in Berne or passport office in the UK for cancellation along with form D01. Next of kin can request the passport to be returned. Likewise if the passport has been lost or mislaid, relatives should get in contact with either the nearest Consulate or passport office for instructions on reporting the loss of the passport.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

There are a number of organisations in the UK that can help bereaved families and friends come to terms with their loss, whether the death was natural or otherwise. Where the death was a result of murder or manslaughter, if you wish, we can put you in touch with the Victim Support National Homicide Service, who will allocate a named caseworker to give you free and confidential help. Charities such as Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM Abroad) – www.sammabroad.org.uk - can help you face the problems and difficulties that arise from a death overseas under suspicious circumstances.

We also have a leaflet called '[Victims of crime abroad](#)' which you may find helpful.

LOCAL VICTIM SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Please click following link for addresses of the Victims' Counselling Centres in Switzerland:

http://www.sodk.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Fachbereiche/Opferhilfe/Adresslisten/2018.05.22_OH-Beratungsstellen.pdf

CONTACT US

If you need further details please let us know. The emotions you may experience after a major personal crisis can be traumatic. Remember that help is available.

Switzerland Desk
Consular Section
King Charles Street
London, SW1A 2PA
Tel: 0044 (0) 207 008 1500

Consular Section
British Embassy Berne
Thunstrasse 50
3000 Berne 15
Tel: 0041 (0)31 3597700

FUNERAL DIRECTORS IN SWITZERLAND & LIECHTENSTEIN LISTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Please visit our [List of funeral directors in Switzerland and Liechtenstein](#) to obtain detailed information.

INTERNATIONAL UNDERTAKERS IN THE UK

The following Funeral Directors are experienced in the procedures involved:

ROWLAND BROTHERS INTERNATIONAL

299-305 Whitehorse Road
West Croydon. Surrey CR0 2HR
Tel: 0044 (0) 208 684 2324
Fax: 0044 (0) 208 684 8000
Email: info@rowlandbrothersinternational.co.uk
Web: www.rowlandbrothersinternational.co.uk

ALBIN INTERNATIONAL REPATRIATION LTD.

83 Westbourne Grove
Bayswater, London W2 4UL
Tel: 0044 (0) 207 313 6920
Fax: 0044 (0) 207 313 6999
Email: info@albininternational.co.uk
Web: www.albininternational.co.uk

FUNERAL CARE INTERNATIONAL

221 Upper Richmond Road
Putney, London SW15 6SQ
Tel: 0044 (0) 208 729 0029
Email: funeralcare.worldwiderepatriation@co-operative.coop

AVALON

UK Head Office

Brooke Court, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 7ES

Tel: 0044 (0) 161 486 2020

Fax: 0044 (0) 161 486 1473

Email: Laurence.Aspinall@avalon-trustee.co.uk

Web: www.avalonfuneralplans.com

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS

618 Warwick Road, Solihull

West Midlands B91 1AA

Tel: 0044 (0) 121 711 1343

Tel. UK: 0845 230 1343

Fax: 0044 (0) 121 711 1351

Email: info@nafd.org.uk

Web: www.nafd.org.uk

THE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF ALLIED AND INDEPENDENT FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Business Centre

3 Bullfields, Sawbridgeworth, Herts. CM21 9DB

Tel: 0044 (0) 1279 726 777

Tel. UK: 0845 230 6777

Fax: 0044 (0) 1279 726 300

Email: info@saif.org.uk

Web: www.saif.org.uk