

FOR NURSES, DOCTORS, CHAPLAINS, MORTUARY AND BEREAVEMENT STAFF

When a Muslim patient dies

Most Muslim families hope to wash, shroud, pray over and bury the person within a day or so. A few small things on the ward make that possible. Notes are marked for the US, the UK and Canada.

This is general guidance, not clinical policy. Follow your own trust, hospital or hospice policy, and ask the family: practice differs between families.

At a glance

- 1 Ask the family before washing the body. Leave the ritual washing to them.
- 3 Keep handling to a minimum, by staff of the same sex where possible.
- 5 Help the family reach their masjid's funeral committee.
- 2 Close the eyes and mouth, straighten the limbs, cover with a clean sheet.
- 4 Tell the doctor, medical examiner or coroner early that the family needs a quick release.

1 In the first hour

DO

- ✓ Close the eyes and mouth, straighten the limbs and cover the body with a clean sheet.
Public Health England, Faith at end of life: a resource for professionals, providers and commissioners working in communities (January 2016), Islam: After death • Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), personal care after death (procedure table)
- ✓ Many families ask for the body to be turned to face Makkah (the qiblah). Help if you can.
Public Health England, Faith at end of life: a resource for professionals, providers and commissioners working in communities (January 2016), Islam: After death
- ✓ Keep touching to a minimum, ideally by staff of the same sex as the patient.
Public Health England, Faith at end of life: a resource for professionals, providers and commissioners working in communities (January 2016), Islam: After death
- ✓ Leave religious items with the body and write them down.
Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), personal care after death (procedure table)

PLEASE DON'T

- ✗ Don't wash the body without asking. Hospice UK's procedure starts with washing "unless requested not to do so for spiritual/religious/cultural reasons", so ask first. The body is usually washed later by family or friends, or the masjid's washers.
Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), personal care after death (procedure table) • Public Health England, Faith at end of life: a resource for professionals, providers and commissioners working in communities (January 2016), Islam: After death

- ✗ Don't shave the body. Some faith groups prohibit it.
Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), personal care after death (procedure table)

- ✗ Don't send the body to the mortuary unclothed.
Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), personal care after death (procedure table)

UNITED KINGDOM

- If the death is being referred to the coroner, don't wash the body, and leave cannulae and lines in place. For a forensic referral, keep contact to a minimum, leave all drains and tubes in, and don't begin mouth care.
Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), personal care after death (procedure table) • Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), paras 54–55

UNITED STATES

- Ask the medical examiner's or coroner's office what it needs.
- The Joint Commission's 2010 roadmap for hospitals lists washing the body, moving it after death and letting people stay near it as matters to approach with sensitivity.
The Joint Commission, A Roadmap for Hospitals (2010), Chapter 4: End-of-Life Care

CANADA

- Ask the medical examiner's or coroner's office what it needs.

2 Releasing the body quickly

Delays in the death certificate, registration and post-mortems, and weekends and public holidays, are what usually hold a Muslim burial up. Where death is expected, record the family's wish for a quick release and act on it:

Hospice UK calls such wishes time critical. Tell the family plainly what can happen, and when.

Public Health England, Faith at end of life (2016), Islam: Post-mortems and Burial • Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), para. 26 • National Medical Examiner's Good Practice Series No. 2 (2021), Caveats

UNITED KINGDOM England and Wales

- Since 9 September 2024 a medical examiner reviews every death not referred to the coroner, and the death cannot be registered until the registrar hears from the medical examiner or coroner.

GOV.UK (DHSC), Death certification reform and the introduction of medical examiners • GOV.UK (DHSC), An overview of the death certification reforms

- National Medical Examiner guidance (2021): holding the body until the MCCD is complete “is not a legal requirement”, and teams can speak to the medical examiner before an expected death to prepare for release out of hours. Not for coroner cases, an unnatural death or an unknown cause; and the body cannot be buried before the death is registered.

National Medical Examiner's Good Practice Series No. 2, How medical examiners can facilitate urgent release of a body (Dr Alan Fletcher; Royal College of Pathologists, April 2021) • National Medical Examiner's Good Practice Series No. 2 (2021), Caveats

- Medical examiner hours differ. One trust reviews religious requests as a priority, and out of hours on the next working day. Check your own office's hours.

Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust, Hospital Faith Deaths: how we support the quick release of your loved one (ref. PI_MS_2100, reviewed April 2026)

- A coroner may prioritise a death for religious reasons and may not rule this out by policy, but there is no automatic priority.
- Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own systems.

Chief Coroner's Guidance No. 28, Report of Death to the Coroner: Decision Making and Expedited Decisions (May 2018) • When to refer: The Notification of Deaths Regulations 2019, reg. 3

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Guide for bereaved family members • nidirect, Coroners, post-mortems and inquests

UNITED STATES Every state

- State law sets the time for completing and filing the death certificate. Deliver it to the funeral director promptly; the cause can be filed as pending. Each state's deadline is on its state page.

CDC National Center for Health Statistics, Physicians' Handbook on Medical Certification of Death (2003 revision), Purpose and Physician responsibilities

- If the medical examiner or coroner takes the case, release depends on that office. Ask it directly about timing.
- Don't suggest embalming by default: no state law requires routine embalming.

Federal Trade Commission, The FTC Funeral Rule

CANADA By province

- Ontario: registering a death needs a Medical Certificate of Death from the doctor or coroner, and the body cannot be buried until the required documents are obtained.

Government of Ontario, What to do when someone dies • Vital Statistics Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. V.4, s. 22 (Ontario e-Laws)

- Alberta: the Chief Medical Examiner's office examines the vast majority of bodies within one working day of arrival, so they can be released for burial.

Government of Alberta, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner: overview

- Other provinces: see the Canada guide.

3 Post-mortem and the family's options

Most Muslims normally do not wish a post-mortem to be carried out unless the law requires it.

Public Health England, Faith at end of life (2016), Islam: Post-mortems and Burial

UNITED KINGDOM

- Families cannot object to a coroner's post-mortem, but if they ask, the coroner must tell them when and where it will take place.

GOV.UK, What to do after someone dies: When a death is reported to a coroner

- Some coroners use CT or MRI scanning, on a limited basis; the coroner decides the kind of examination.

Chief Coroner's Guidance No. 1, The use of Post-Mortem Imaging (Adults)

UNITED STATES

- Some states let a relative object to an autopsy on religious grounds, with exceptions. Each state page says what applies there.

CANADA

- In Ontario, coroners must consider the religious views of the deceased and the family when deciding whether a post-mortem is needed.

Government of Ontario, Office of the Chief Coroner and the Ontario Forensic Pathology Service (coroners' code of ethics)

4 Organ donation

Scholars differ. The International Islamic Fiqh Academy permitted donation under conditions, including the donor's consent; other scholars and councils do not. The family guide

International Islamic Fiqh Academy, Resolution 26 (1/4), 1988

UNITED STATES

- The hospital must notify the organ procurement organisation (OPO) of deaths and imminent deaths. Only an OPO representative or a designated requestor approaches the family, with discretion and sensitivity to the family's views and beliefs.

42 CFR 482.45(a), Condition of participation: Organ, tissue, and eye procurement

- If the patient registered as a donor in their state, that registration is their own permission to donate. If not, the family is told its options and may agree or decline.

HRSA, organdonor.gov, Frequently asked questions (archived 30 September 2026) • 42 CFR 482.45(a), Condition of participation: Organ, tissue, and eye procurement

UNITED KINGDOM

- In England, since 20 May 2020, most adults are considered donors unless they opted out, but the family is still consulted.

NHS Blood and Transplant, Organ donation law in England

CANADA

- Follow your hospital's donation policy.

⑤ The family at the bedside

- Let the family stay with the person, pray and recite the Qur'ān by the bed. You may hear the words “Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.”

The Joint Commission, A Roadmap for Hospitals (2010), Chapter 4: End-of-Life Care • Qur'ān, al-Baqarah 2:156

- Ask early, before death where you can, about a quick release, washing and donation. Call the chaplaincy for support.

Hospice UK, Care after death guidance, edition 5.2 (2025), para. 26 • The Joint Commission, Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient- and Family-Centered Care: A Roadmap for Hospitals (2010), quoting standard RI.01.01.01

- Be honest about times. If release cannot happen today, say why and when it can.

Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust, Hospital Faith Deaths: how we support the quick release of your loved one (ref. PI_MS_2100, reviewed April 2026)

⑥ Who to call

The family's masjid funeral committee arranges the washing, the shroud, the prayer and the burial, often with a Muslim funeral home. If the family does not know who to call, find one in the [directory](#) or by city. Step-by-step guides for families: [US](#), [UK](#), [Canada](#).

⑦ Why speed matters

The Prophet ﷺ said: “Hurry with the funeral.” When Abū Salamah died, he closed his eyes and prayed for him. The washing is a ritual done by the community: three, five or more times, with water and sidr, beginning with the right side. A husband or wife may wash their spouse.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1315 • Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 920 • Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1253 • Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1255 • Sunan Ibn Mājah 1465 (ḥasan)

Last checked against its sources: October 2026. Every source is listed on the [sources page](#). Something wrong? [Tell us](#)