

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ

Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn. Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return. Qurʾān, al-Baqarah 2:156

We are sorry. Here is what happens next.

As soon as you can, call your masjid's funeral committee.

They will arrange the washing, the shroud, the prayer and the burial, and tell you which funeral company to use.

You do not have to do this alone, or all at once. Your masjid has done this many times. Follow the steps in order, and open each one when you reach it.

New This guide is new and has not yet been reviewed by people in Switzerland. If something here is wrong or out of date where you live, please tell us at hello@lifeistemporary.com.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS IN SWITZERLAND

Reporting the death to the Zivilstandsamt	A hospital or care home reports the death itself. Otherwise the family must report it within two days, usually to the civil registry office of the place of death, with the original medical certificate; a funeral company or the commune's funeral office can do it with written authority. No burial may take place until the office confirms the report. In the city of Zürich every death must also be reported to the funeral office within 48 hours. ch.ch, Todesfall: Checkliste; Stadt Zürich, Vorgehen bei einem Todesfall
Legalinspektion, prosecutor and autopsy	If there are signs that the death was not natural, the public prosecutor orders an examination by a forensic doctor (Legalinspektion). With no sign of a crime and the identity known, the body is released for burial; otherwise the prosecutor can order further tests and, if needed, an autopsy. In Vaud an autopsy must respect the deceased's culture and religion, a clinical or private autopsy needs express consent, and the cantonal doctor can order an autopsy without consent when public health justifies it. StPO Art. 253; Vaud RDSPF art. 14 and 15
Burial times and burial abroad	Burial times are cantonal. Geneva: no burial less than 48 hours after the death, and only after it has been reported to the civil registry office. Vaud: between 48 and 96 hours after the death, extendable to 120 hours if the body is kept in a refrigerated room, with exceptions from the commune on a doctor's statement. We have not checked other cantons; ask the commune's funeral office. Geneva LCim art. 3A; Vaud RDSPF art. 41
Burial times and burial abroad	Transport abroad follows federal law and international agreements. In Vaud it needs a pass (laissez-passer) from the prefect of the district of death and a record of the placing in the coffin made by the commune. Ask the funeral company which documents apply for your route, and call the destination country's consulate early. The estate usually pays, or the family if there is no money in it. Ask the funeral company what it costs and who signs before you agree. Vaud RDSPF art. 33

Coffin, Muslim fields and graves

Geneva's law requires burial in a closed coffin, and Bern's Muslim field is a field of coffin graves; we found no canton allowing a shroud alone. Muslim fields exist in Zürich (Witikon and one other), Bern (Bremgarten), Basel-Stadt (Hörnli, free for residents) and Geneva (Saint-Georges). Row graves are not permanent: in Bern and Basel-Stadt the rest period is 20 years, not extendable in Bern. Zürich gives residents a free row grave, and family graves can be rented and renewed. Geneva LCim art. 4; Stadt Bern (2020); Basel-Stadt Reihengräber; Stadt Zürich, Friedhof Witikon and Grabarten; Ville de Genève, Saint-Georges

The Erbbescheinigung and the estate

Heirs usually prove their right with a certificate of inheritance from a cantonal authority, which differs by canton; with a will, it can be asked for only after the will is opened. It can cost a few hundred to a few thousand francs. Without a will, children inherit equally and a husband or wife takes half beside them. Since 2023 children and a spouse can claim half of their legal share, so ask a notary how the heirs can follow the Islamic shares. ch.ch, Erbschein; Erbfolge; ZGB Art. 457, 462, 471, 559

Refusing an inheritance in debt

We did not find a simplified federal procedure for small estates. An heir who does not want the inheritance must refuse it within three months by registered letter to the authority where the deceased last lived. If the debts are unclear, a public inventory can be asked for within one month of learning of the death. ch.ch, Erbe ausschlagen; ZGB Art. 567

Survivors’ pensions and free burial

Many communes give their residents a free burial: the city of Geneva covers a standard coffin, the washing and three days in a mortuary, and Zürich and Basel-Stadt give residents a free row grave. A widow, widower or orphan can claim a survivors' pension from the compensation fund where the deceased last paid contributions; a full widow's or widower's pension is CHF 1,008 to 2,016 a month. ch.ch, Witwenrente; Todesfall: Checkliste; Ville de Genève FAQ; Stadt Zürich Grabarten; Basel-Stadt Reihengräber

From official sources, checked October 2026. Laws change; your funeral company and a notary can confirm them.

WHERE YOU ARE

Switzerland has one federal law for registering a death and for inheritance, and this guide describes it. Burial law is made by each of the 26 cantons, and cemeteries are run by the communes, so burial times, the coffin rule, grave terms and costs differ by canton and commune. We name the rules we checked for Geneva, Vaud, Zürich, Bern and Basel-Stadt. For anywhere else, ask the commune's funeral office (Bestattungsamt, service des pompes funèbres) or a funeral company.

1

Have the death confirmed

In the first hour

A doctor has to confirm the death and write the medical death certificate (ärztliche Todesbescheinigung, certificat médical de décès) before anything else can happen. A hospital or care home arranges it itself.

- [ ] In a hospital or care home, the staff arrange the certificate
- [ ] At home, call the family doctor or the emergency medical service
- [ ] If the death was caused by an accident, violence or suicide, call the police on 117
- [ ] In an emergency, call 144 or 112
- [ ] Tell the staff early that the family needs a quick burial for religious reasons

WHO SIGNS

At home, the family doctor or the emergency service confirms the death and writes the certificate. After an accident or a crime, the police must be told. ch.ch, Todesfall: Checkliste (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026) ; Stadt Zürich, Vorgehen bei einem Todesfall (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

and

Close the eyes, cover the body, make duʿā

In the first hour · at the same time as the step above

Gently and without hurry. Those present can do this while the calls are made.

- [ ] Close the eyes and the mouth
- [ ] Straighten the arms and legs
- [ ] Cover the body with a clean sheet
- [ ] Pray for them, and say only good

EVIDENCE

The Prophet ﷺ closed the eyes of Abū Salamah and prayed for him. Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 920

2

Call the mosque's funeral service

In the first few hours

Many mosques and Muslim associations help with the washing, the shroud, the prayer and the burial, and know which funeral company to use. In many communes the commune's own funeral office (Bestattungsamt, service des pompes funèbres) also arranges burials.

- [ ] Call the mosque's funeral service or the imam
- [ ] Tell them where the body is and who the next of kin is
- [ ] Call the commune's funeral office to ask what it provides
- [ ] Agree a time for the ghusl and the janazah prayer

NO NUMBER?

Call the nearest large mosque. They will know who to call.

3

Ask whether the prosecutor is involved PAPERWORK

If the death was sudden or violent

If there are signs that the death was not natural, the public prosecutor (Staatsanwaltschaft, Ministère public) orders an examination of the body by a forensic doctor (Legalinspektion). If there is no sign of a crime and the identity is known, the body is released for burial. Otherwise the prosecutor can order further tests and, if needed, an autopsy.

- [ ] Ask the police where the body has been taken
- [ ] Ask the prosecutor's office early, in writing, to release the body quickly for religious reasons
- [ ] Ask the funeral company to collect the release as soon as it is given

THE LAW

The prosecutor orders the forensic examination. With no sign of a crime and the identity known, the body is released for burial. Otherwise the prosecutor may keep the body as long as the investigation needs it. We have not found a rule letting the family refuse a judicial autopsy on religious grounds.
Schweizerische Strafprozessordnung (StPO), Art. 253

VAUD

An autopsy must respect the deceased's culture and religion, and the body must be returned as quickly as possible. A clinical or private autopsy needs the express consent of the deceased or the family. When public health justifies it, the cantonal doctor can order an autopsy without consent.
Canton de Vaud, Règlement sur les décès, les sépultures et les pompes funèbres (RDSPF, BLV 818.41.1), art. 14 et 15 (état au 1er janvier 2018, lu sur LexFind)

4 Report the death to the Zivilstandsamt PAPERWORK

Within two days

A hospital or care home reports the death itself. Otherwise the family must report it within two days, usually to the civil registry office (Zivilstandsamt, office de l'état civil) of the place of death, with the original medical certificate. There can be no burial until the office confirms the report.

- [ ] Take the original medical certificate
- [ ] Take the deceased's family record book or partnership certificate, passport or ID, and residence permit if they were not Swiss
- [ ] Or give a funeral company or the commune's funeral office written authority to do it
- [ ] In the city of Zürich, report the death to the funeral office within 48 hours

THE DEADLINE

Within two days, in writing or in person. The office then confirms the report for the burial, and issues the death certificate on request. ch.ch, Todesfall: Checkliste (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

ZÜRICH CITY

Every death in the city must be reported to the funeral office (Bestattungsamt) within 48 hours. Stadt Zürich, Vorgehen bei einem Todesfall (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

5 Choose the funeral service and the grave PAPERWORK

Within the first day

Many communes offer their residents a free burial, and some a free grave. The coffin rule is cantonal. The rules we read expect a coffin, and we have not found a canton that allows burial in a shroud alone, so ask early.

- [ ] Ask the commune what it provides free, and what you must pay for
- [ ] Ask which cemetery has a Muslim field, and whether the deceased qualifies for it
- [ ] Ask where the washing can be done, and who may do it

A COFFIN

Geneva's law requires burial in a closed coffin. Bern's Muslim field is a field of coffin graves. République et canton de Genève, Loi sur les cimetières (LCim, rsGE K 1 65), art. 3A et 4 (texte en vigueur) ; Stadt Bern, Merkblatt Grabfeld für Muslime (Stand Juli 2020)

- [ ] Ask how long the grave lasts, and whether it can be renewed

FREE BURIAL

The city of Geneva gives its residents a free funeral: a standard coffin, the washing, dressing and placing in the coffin, and three days in a mortuary. The city of Zürich gives residents a free row grave. Ville de Genève, Faire face au décès d'un proche : FAQ (vérifié le 10 octobre 2026) ; Stadt Zürich, Grabarten (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

ZÜRICH

Zürich has two Muslim fields. The one at Witikon has row, family and children's graves facing Mecca. A family grave is rented for a set number of years and can be renewed. Stadt Zürich, Friedhof Witikon (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026) ; Stadt Zürich, Grabarten (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

BERN

Bern's Muslim field is at the Bremgarten cemetery, with graves given in order of death. The legal rest period is 20 years and cannot be extended, but the field is cleared only as a whole, so many graves stay longer. Stadt Bern, Merkblatt Grabfeld für Muslime (Stand Juli 2020)

BASEL AND GENEVA

Basel-Stadt's Muslim field is at the Hörnli cemetery, free for residents, with a rest period of 20 years. Geneva has confessional sections for Muslims at the Saint-Georges cemetery. Kanton Basel-Stadt, Stadtgärtnerei, Reihengräber (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026) ; Ville de Genève, Cimetière de Saint-Georges (vérifié le 10 octobre 2026)

and

Wash and shroud the body

Within the first day · at the same time as the step above

Done by trained Muslims of the same sex, or by the spouse. The funeral service usually provides the cloth.

- [ ] Confirm who will wash
- [ ] Confirm the kafan is ready

How the washing and shroud are done ›

SPOUSES

A wife may wash her husband: Ibn al-Mundhir reports consensus. Most scholars allow a husband to wash his wife, and the Prophet ﷺ told ʿĀʾishah that if she died before him he would wash her (Ibn Mājah 1465); the Ḥanafī school does not allow the husband to. Ibn Qudāmah, al-Mughnī (Ḥanbalī, with the other schools), 2:390 ; Ibn ʿĀbidīn, Radd al-Muḥtār (Ḥanafī), 2:198–199

6

The janazah prayer and the burial

As soon as possible

The prayer is often held after one of the daily prayers, and the burial follows straight after.

- [ ] Tell family and community the time of the prayer

HASTE

The Prophet ﷺ told us to hurry with the funeral. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1315

- [ ] Confirm the grave in a Muslim field
- [ ] Plan the burial for at least 48 hours after the death where your canton requires it, and ask whether an exception is possible
- [ ] Ask the commune which days it buries

How to pray the janazah prayer ›

GENEVA

No burial may take place less than 48 hours after the death, and only after the death has been reported to the civil registry office. République et canton de Genève, Loi sur les cimetières (LCim, rsGE K 1 65), art. 3A et 4 (texte en vigueur) ; Ville de Genève, Faire face au décès d'un proche : FAQ (vérifié le 10 octobre 2026)

VAUD

Burial must take place between 48 and 96 hours after the death, and the maximum can be extended to 120 hours if the body is kept in a refrigerated room; ask the commune to confirm. The commune can allow exceptions on a doctor's statement that there is no public-health objection. Canton de Vaud, RDSPF (BLV 818.41.1), art. 41 (état au 1er janvier 2018, lu sur LexFind)

OTHER CANTONS

We have not yet checked the burial times in Zürich, Bern, Basel-Stadt or other cantons. Ask the commune's funeral office.

and

If the burial will be abroad PAPERWORK

Before the coffin is closed · at the same time as the step above

Many families bury their dead in another country, for example in Türkiye, Kosovo, North Macedonia or North Africa. Federal law and international agreements set the conditions. Ask the funeral company which documents and which office apply for your route. The estate usually pays, or the family if there is no money in it. Ask the funeral company what it costs and who signs before you agree.

- [ ] Tell the funeral company early that the burial will be abroad
- [ ] Call the consulate of the country early to ask what documents and conditions it requires
- [ ] Ask the consulate whether it requires embalming
- [ ] Check any insurance or funeral fund first

VAUD

Transport for burial abroad needs a pass (laissez-passer) from the prefect of the district where the death happened, and a record of the placing in the coffin made by the commune. Canton de Vaud, RDSPF (BLV 818.41.1), art. 33 (état au 1er janvier 2018, lu sur LexFind)

THE CONSULATE

Ask the destination country's consulate in Switzerland early, before the coffin is closed, what it requires.

7

Get copies of the death certificate PAPERWORK

In the first week

Banks, insurers and others often ask for a death certificate (Todesschein, acte de décès) from the civil registry office. Ask each one what proof it needs.

- [ ] Order copies from the civil registry office once the death is recorded

WHERE

After recording the death, the civil registry office issues the death certificate when it is ordered. Ask the office the fee. ch.ch, Todesfall: Checkliste (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

8

Pay the funeral costs and list every debt

In the first weeks

The funeral is paid from the estate first, then the debts. Nothing is inherited until both are settled.

- [ ] Pay the funeral costs from the estate
- [ ] List loans, bills and money owed to family
- [ ] Ask a scholar about any unpaid zakat
- [ ] If the debts may be larger than the estate, read the time limits below before you accept anything

THE ORDER

Funeral, then debts, then bequests from a third, then the heirs. al-Sirājiyyah (al-Sajāwandī), opening chapter

REFUSING AN ESTATE IN DEBT

An heir who does not want the inheritance must say so within three months, by registered letter to the authority where the deceased last lived. If you are unsure of the debts, you can ask that authority for a public inventory within one month of learning of the death. ch.ch, Erbe ausschlagen (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

and

Find the will, and claim the survivors' pension PAPERWORK

In the first weeks · at the same time as the step above

Any will that is found must be handed to the cantonal authority straight away, even if it seems invalid. A widow, widower or orphan may be owed a survivors' pension.

- [ ] Check papers at home, email, and with any notary
- [ ] Hand any will you find to the authority where the deceased last lived
- [ ] Apply for the survivors' pension at the compensation fund (Ausgleichskasse) where the deceased last paid contributions

HAND IT IN

A will found at the death must be delivered to the authority at once, even if it is thought invalid. Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch (ZGB), Art. 556

SURVIVORS' PENSION

A full widow's or widower's pension is between CHF 1,008 and CHF 2,016 a month. The 2nd pillar may add a further survivors' pension. ch.ch, Witwen-, Witwer- und Waisenrente (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

- [ ] Ask the employer's pension fund (2nd pillar) about any further survivors' pension
- [ ] Secure the house and car, and keep the phone line active for sign-in codes

9

Settle and divide the estate PAPERWORK

In the months after

Heirs usually prove who they are with a certificate of inheritance (Erbbescheinigung, certificat d'héritier) from a cantonal authority. Which authority depends on the canton. Swiss law shares an estate without a will equally between sons and daughters, so dividing by the Islamic shares usually needs a valid will or the heirs' agreement.

- [ ] Ask the authority where the deceased last lived for the certificate of inheritance
- [ ] Close accounts and cancel subscriptions
- [ ] Pay any bequest, up to one third, to people who are not heirs
- [ ] Divide the rest by the fixed shares

See how the estate divides ›

ONE THIRD
A bequest is limited to a third, and an heir cannot receive one. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2742 ; Sunan Abī Dāwūd 2870 (ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ)

THE CERTIFICATE
If there is a will, the certificate can be asked for only after the authority has opened it, and it is issued once a month has passed since the heirs were told, if no one has disputed it. It can cost a few hundred to a few thousand francs. ch.ch, Erbschein (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026) ; Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch (ZGB), Art. 559

WITHOUT A WILL
Children inherit first, in equal shares. A husband or wife takes half beside the children. An unmarried partner has no automatic share. Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch (ZGB), Art. 457 und 462 ; ch.ch, Erbfolge: Wer wie viel erbt (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

THE RESERVED SHARE

Since 2023, children and a husband or wife can claim a reserved share (Pflichtteil): half of what they would have inherited without a will. Parents no longer have one. Ask a notary whether and how the heirs can agree a different division. Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch (ZGB), Art. 470 und 471 (Fassung seit 1. Januar 2023) ; ch.ch, Erbfolge: Wer wie viel erbt (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

10

Look after the family

Four months and ten days

A woman keeps the prescribed mourning (iḥdād: setting aside adornment and perfume) for no more than three days for any death, except for her husband: then four months and ten days, the length of her ʿiddah, or until she gives birth if she is pregnant.

- [ ] Bring food and help with the household
- [ ] Help the widow with errands and appointments
- [ ] Make duʿā for the one who has died

What to say and do when you visit ›

EVIDENCE

A woman who believes in Allah and the Last Day does not mourn beyond three days, except for a husband: four months and ten days. A pregnant widow's term ends with the birth. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1280 ; Qurʾān, al-Ṭalāq 65:4

FOOD

Prepare food for the family, for what has happened has occupied them. Sunan Abī Dāwūd 3132 (ḥasan, al-Albānī)

ʿIDDAH DATES

Work out when four months and ten days have passed, by the Hijri and the Western calendar. Open ↗

11

Write your own Islamic will

Without a valid will, Swiss law decides who inherits, not the fixed shares, and sons and daughters inherit equally. An Islamic will in Switzerland is an ordinary Swiss will that directs the estate by the shares, as far as the reserved shares allow.

- [ ] Write it entirely by hand, with the year, month and day, and sign it; or make it before a notary and two witnesses
- [ ] Leave it with the official office your canton provides for keeping wills
- [ ] Tell your family your burial wishes now: a will is often opened only after the funeral
- [ ] Ask a notary or lawyer how the reserved shares affect the Islamic shares

Work out the Islamic shares to take to a notary ›

VALID WILL

A handwritten will must be written by hand from start to finish, including the year, month and day, and signed. Each canton must offer an office where it can be kept. A public will is made before a notary and two witnesses. Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch (ZGB), Art. 505 ; ch.ch, Testament und Erbvertrag (geprüft am 10. Oktober 2026)

THE RESERVED SHARES

Children and a husband or wife can each claim half of what the law would have given them. Keep each one's Islamic share at or above that, or ask a notary how to plan for it. Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch (ZGB), Art. 470 und 471 (Fassung seit 1. Januar 2023)

ANOTHER NATIONALITY

Swiss law applies to the estate of someone who last lived in Switzerland. A foreign national can instead put the estate under the law of their nationality in a will. The choice falls away if, at death, they no longer hold that nationality or have become Swiss. Ask a notary or lawyer before relying on this. Bundesgesetz über das Internationale Privatrecht (IPRG), Art. 90

General guidance, not a fatwa or legal advice. Burial law in Switzerland is made by each of the 26 cantons, and cemeteries are run by the communes, so burial times, the coffin rule and grave terms differ by canton; your funeral company and a notary can confirm them.

Last reviewed October 2026. Something wrong? Tell us