

## Coroner

A directive issued by the Department of the Coroner regarding the processing of cases in which there is a reasonable suspicion of child abuse and neglect has been in effect since 1999. Investigation of a child abuse case takes priority over the investigation of any other homicide. In order to ensure that a comprehensive investigation is completed, a coroner's pediatric investigator with special training in child abuse and neglect cases is assigned for any case in which the decedent is under the age of fourteen. The assigned investigator is responsible for

- initiating a Child Death Report to DCFS
- locating birth and medical records if immediately available and forwarding them to the Deputy Medical Examiner [DME]
- providing follow-up information to families in deferred cases
- providing follow-up investigation for the DME

It is preferable that before the autopsy be conducted a complete set of photographs and full-body x-rays are taken. The x-rays are referred to the radiologist for an evaluation. If possible, the autopsy should not be conducted until the evaluation by the radiologist is completed in case additional x-rays are necessary.

The autopsy should be done immediately upon the completion of the investigation. The DME is directed to photograph and document the location, size and color of all injuries. Microscopic sections of injuries and all organs are taken for dating of injuries and for abnormal pathologic findings. The eyes must be submitted to ophthalmologic pathology for evaluation. The brain is submitted in each case to neuropathology for analysis. The DME must request paramedic and complete hospital records, any hospital photographs, the results of any sexual assault tests taken at the treating hospital and copies of all hospital x-rays. When indicated, a sexual assault kit will be collected from the child by the DME prior to washing or photographing the body.

The DME should consult with the investigating law enforcement agency. If the law enforcement agency has not made the required report to DCFS, the DME is directed to do so by immediately calling the Child Protection Hotline.

In instances where the cause of death has been finalized, case files are public records. A hold can be placed upon records:

- in deferred cases
- in cases where the law enforcement agency requests a security hold
- in cases where the request is for a child abuse report, medical records or police reports
- in cases where the death occurred in foster care