

In Illinois, if a death occurs and comes under the jurisdiction of the county coroner, an autopsy is at the discretion of the Coroner unless required by statute as in a custody death or the death of an infant in apparent good health. At times, there may be an objection to the autopsy based on religious beliefs. The Coroner must consider all aspects of the death investigation and decide whether or not to honor the objection, limit the autopsy, or authorize a complete autopsy for the good of the public.

If the Coroner decides to honor the objection or limit the autopsy, a release of responsibility for the Coroner must be signed by the family to protect the Coroner from civil repercussions from the absence of an autopsy or incomplete autopsy.

The Illinois Coroner and Medical Examiners Association recognize that certain religions have special considerations during the full or limited autopsy. Listed below are some guidelines for the procedure:

1. Limit, as much as possible, the collection of specimens for toxicology, histology, or special studies;
2. Leave the decedent inside the body bag during the dissection to preserve as much bodily fluids as possible;
3. Return all tissue and bodily fluids to the body bag that are not used for determining a diagnosis or as needed to determine manner and cause;
4. Gather all towels, sponges or any other material with bodily fluids and return to the decedent in the body bag;
5. Wipe all surfaces and instruments and return all wipes to the decedent in the body bag;
6. At the discretion of the Coroner or his/her representative, a member of the religious order to which the decedent is a member, will be given consideration to attend the examination in an advisory role to assist in preserving as much bodily fluids and tissue as possible back to the decedent prior to final disposition.