

Sands position statement

Taking the baby home

All bereaved parents should be offered the opportunity to take their baby's body home. Some parents will want to take their baby's body home and others will not.

The only circumstance in which this is not possible is when a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) cannot be issued and the death is being referred to the coroner or procurator fiscal. There are no other legal reasons to prevent parents from taking their baby home.

If there are good clinical reasons for discouraging parents from taking their baby home or if the parents do not feel comfortable or able to do so, they should be offered the option of a longer stay in hospital. This may be especially important if parents do not live near the hospital.

Potential benefits for parents who want to take their baby home include:

- more time with their baby away from a clinical setting and an opportunity to say goodbye in the privacy of their own home
- time to introduce the baby to siblings, extended family and friends and to recognise the baby's place within the family
- more opportunities to create memories
- an opportunity to parent and care for their baby.

Information for staff

Responsibility for the baby's body

When a baby dies, the parents are legally responsible for ensuring that the body is buried or cremated. The legal requirement for burial or cremation does not apply to babies who are miscarried before 24 weeks' gestation, although some parents may arrange burial or cremation for these babies. Some parents may also choose to delegate responsibility for the burial or cremation to the hospital if this option is offered.

Paperwork from the hospital

Sands recommends that parents who want to take their baby out of the hospital should be given a document confirming their right to do so. There is no legal requirement for this form but it may protect the parents. For example, in the unlikely event of a traffic accident.

This form should include a declaration that is signed by the parents to confirm that they are taking responsibility for their baby's body and that they will either bring the baby back to the hospital or arrange the funeral themselves. The form should also include the contact details of someone at the hospital who can confirm the parents' right to take their baby home if needed. A sample form is attached and is also available to download from the Sands website. <https://www.uk-sands.org/professionals/resources-for-health-professionals/forms-and-certificates>

Transport

Parents can take their baby home by car. Some authorities advise that safety seats and belts are used to ensure that the baby is secure during the journey. Alternatively, the baby could be placed in a Moses basket which is secured with a seat belt. Parents or other people who accompany them may need to hold the Moses basket to keep it steady during the journey.

If the parents want to take their baby home by taxi or minicab, they should check first that the driver is willing to transport the body. Public transport is not advisable.

Who should be informed?

The hospital mortuary should be informed and should receive a copy of the signed form for the mortuary register.

The mother's GP, community midwife and health visitor should be told that the parents are taking their baby home in case the parents need support. There is no need to inform the police or any other authorities.

If the mother has mental health difficulties or a history of mental health problems, additional support and advice should be sought from a mental health professional (if appropriate). Arrangements should then be made for additional support to be offered to parents by professionals in the community.

How long should the baby be at home?

This depends on the baby's condition and on the temperature of the room in which he or she will be kept. Although there is no specific time limit, a maximum of three days is advisable unless there is to be a post mortem examination (see below). Hospitals may want to consider buying a cold cot to lend to parents in this situation or offer information about local charities or organisations that provide this service to parents.

Parents should be advised how to keep their baby cool and be told about changes that may occur in the baby's appearance such as darkening of the lips. Parents may want to consider these changes when deciding how long to have their baby at home. They should also be warned that the baby's skin may be fragile. In this case, they may want to place the baby on a pillow when holding the baby.

Post mortems

If the parents have agreed to a post mortem, they should be asked to bring their baby back to the hospital after approximately 24 hours. This is because the chance of finding out why the baby died is more likely if a post mortem is done sooner.

A baby can also be taken home *after* a post mortem examination. The sites of suture lines and leakage should be explained to the parents in these instances. Staff should also explain how parents should care for and hold the baby's body after the post mortem.

Support at home

Sands recommends that parents are given a 24-hour contact number at the hospital so that they can call for help and support if they need it.

A GP, community midwife, health visitor or member of the hospital bereavement team should also visit parents at home to ensure that they are coping. These visits could be as frequent as daily based on the parents' wishes.

What happens next?

- **If the baby was stillborn or died in the neonatal period**, there is a legal requirement to bury or cremate the baby.
- **If the baby was born dead before 24 completed weeks of pregnancy**, the death cannot be registered and there is no legal requirement to bury or cremate the baby although some parents may choose to do so.

If the hospital is arranging the funeral, the parents should be advised when they would need to bring the baby back and where they need to take him or her.

If the parents are arranging the funeral themselves, they can take the baby to the funeral director if they are using one. It may sometimes be possible for the parents to take the baby to the cemetery or crematorium themselves but this should be checked with the cemetery or crematorium management.

A baby's body cannot be taken out of the country without following the appropriate legal procedures. A funeral director can offer professional advice.

Conclusion

Bereaved parents should receive information about the option of taking their baby home. A health professional should talk them through the practicalities involved and any emotional support offered. The parents' decision will be individual to them and must be supported and respected.

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Improving bereavement care team

Name of hospital/ trust/ health board

[NOTE: Change baby's body to fetal remains if requested by parents.]

Form for parents who take their baby's body home

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that (name(s) of parent(s))

of (address) _____

Have taken their baby's body from (name and address of hospital) _____

_____ Date _____

I / We, the parent(s), hereby take full responsibility for our baby whilst they are in our care.
We will (tick as appropriate):

return our baby to the hospital on (date) _____

make our own funeral arrangements.

Parent(s) Name(s) (please print):

Signature _____ Signature _____

Name of staff member (please print) _____

Position (please print) _____

In case of need or concern please contact:

Staff member's name _____ Job Title _____

Department direct line _____ Signature _____

24-hour phone contact for support _____