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DEATH OF SINGAPOREANS OVERSEAS

RETURN OF REMAINS TO SINGAPORE - A GUIDE FOR BEREAVED FAMILIES

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INTRODUCTION

The death of a relative can be traumatic and distressing. This guide serves to provide general guidance to the family of a Singaporean who has passed away overseas.

Please note that some parts of this guide may not apply in certain cases due to the different circumstances surrounding each death, varying local laws and customs, and the availability of certain facilities in different countries.

What Our Consular Officers **can** do

- Notify the Next-of-Kin (NOK) on the death.
- Provide a list of funeral services providers as a reference only. The Singapore Government and the Singapore Overseas Missions do not vouch for the service and reliability of the funeral service providers. NOK should contact the funeral service provider directly for the cost and other logistical arrangements. Please note that the list is non-exhaustive. The NOK are free to choose other providers not within the list.
- Liaise with foreign authorities, if necessary. We can assist in transferring funds from the NOK to pay for burial or cremation expenses, if it is not possible for the NOK to pay or transfer directly (*Only in locations where Singapore Overseas Missions are present*)

What Our Consular Officers **cannot** do

- Investigate the cause of death
- Make insurance claims on behalf of the family of the deceased
- Provide legal advice
- Pay for burial or cremation expenses
- Pay for the return of the remains to Singapore
- Pay for any outstanding bills or debts. In the event of inadequate medical/travel insurance, the NOK or friends of the deceased would have to cover these expenses

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Once notified of the death of a Singaporean overseas, MFA will verify the deceased's identity (i.e. name, date of birth, passport number) with the assistance of the relevant Singapore authorities and inform the NOK.

Upon being notified of the death, the NOK should:

- a. Ensure that the death is registered with the foreign authorities in the country/place where the death occurred and obtain a death certificate. The name in the death certificate must be the same as the name in the deceased's Singapore passport or identity card.
- b. Confirm if the deceased had purchased comprehensive travel insurance which covers death and repatriation of remains. If so, the NOK should notify the insurance company immediately.
- c. Decide if it is necessary to travel to identify the remains and make the necessary arrangements (e.g. collect the deceased's personal belongings, liaise with an overseas funeral director etc.). If travelling overseas, at least one NOK should bring along a valid document as proof of relationship to the deceased (e.g. birth certificate or marriage certificate etc.)
- d. Decide whether to repatriate the body to Singapore or cremate the deceased overseas and bring back the ashes. Alternatively, the NOK may decide to bury* the remains there, subject to the local regulations.
- e. Appoint a funeral services provider in Singapore/overseas. If the decision is to repatriate the body to Singapore, the NOK is advised to appoint a funeral services provider who is familiar with international repatriation arrangements and requirements.
- f. If the NOK would like to repatriate the body to Singapore and be on the same flight as the coffin, the NOK is advised to inform the appointed funeral services provider overseas in advance so that arrangements can be made for the NOK to travel on the same flight.

If the cause of death is not due to natural causes, the NOK should also request for a police report.

***Important Note:**

Permission has to be granted by the National Environment Agency (NEA) for a body of non-Singaporean/non-Permanent Resident to be imported into Singapore. Due to the limited size of Singapore's burial grounds, bodies of foreign nationals are generally not allowed to be imported into Singapore for burial.

REPATRIATION OF BODY BACK TO SINGAPORE

For repatriation of the body to Singapore, the following documents are required to accompany the coffin to facilitate clearance of the coffin into Singapore:

a) Death Certificate issued by the country where the death occurred (an English-translated copy is required if the death certificate is not in English)

The death certificate should include the following:

- Deceased's name (Ensure that the name is in English as indicated in the passport or identity card)
- Nationality
- Passport number
- Date of death
- Cause of death

The original death certificate must accompany the coffin. If the NOK is not travelling on the same flight as the coffin and is holding on to the original death certificate, he must ensure that there is at least one copy of the death certificate accompanying the coffin.

b) Deceased Particulars

The NOK should include a copy of the deceased's passport biodata page or NRIC.

c) Embalming Certificate

This is to certify that the body has been embalmed. Please inform the embalmer/funeral services provider to remove any cardiac pacemaker and applicable devices from the deceased's body. For bodies of suspect or confirmed cases of emerging infectious diseases of concern (e.g. MERS, Ebola, Avian influenza or other novel and dangerous infections), the body should not be sprayed, washed or embalmed in Singapore. Please refer to "**Other Relevant Information**" for handling of bodies with suspect or confirmed infection of emerging disease of concern.

d) Sealing Certificate for the coffin (an English-translated copy is required if it is not in English)

This is to certify that the coffin is hermetically sealed and metal-lined.

e) Coffin Export Permit

This is a permit usually issued by the Port Health Officer or a medical officer of a relevant medical department/authority in the country of origin to authorise export of the body and is often required by the local authority.

f) Air Waybill (Air Consignment Note) (Optional)

g) Additional Information

If the body is to be brought back to Singapore for cremation, it is important to note that the cremator chamber in Singapore can only accommodate coffins up to the maximum dimensions of length 210 cm, width 60 cm and height 56 cm. If the coffin exceeds the permissible dimensions, the body would need to be transferred to another coffin which meets the maximum dimensions before cremation can take place.

For burial of remains in Singapore, the coffin size should not exceed length 210 cm, width 90 cm and height 80 cm.

h) Exhumation Certificate

This is applicable only in cases where exhumed remains of the deceased are to be brought into Singapore.

If the above documents are not in English, a translation in English must be provided especially for death and embalming certificates. Translations from private organisations are accepted. MFA is unable to provide translation services.

The above documents, together with a Letter of Authorisation (LOA), should be provided to the appointed funeral services provider in Singapore who will assist to apply for an import permit from the Singapore National Environment Agency (NEA) Port Health Office to facilitate the importation of the body into Singapore. The Permit to Bury/Cremate will be granted only if the deceased's NOK gives the LOA for the appointed funeral services provider to apply for the permit.

The NOK should inform MFA of the transportation details of the coffin such as date and flight number. The information would be conveyed to NEA Port Health Office to facilitate the clearance procedures.

Other Relevant Information

If the deceased suffered from an emerging infectious disease of concern (e.g. MERS, Ebola, Avian influenza or other novel and dangerous infections etc.), it is essential to inform the authorities overseas and in Singapore so that the necessary precautions can be taken.

The importation of bodies with suspected/confirmed emerging infectious diseases of concern is assessed on a case-by-case basis. Upon approval, the following guidelines for the importation and cremation/burial of the body must be adhered to:

- a. Only funeral services providers that have undergone the Basic Infection Control Course (BICC) in Singapore can handle the body of a deceased who suffered from an infectious condition. The funeral services providers are to follow strictly the general precautionary measures. You may refer to the list of BICC-trained funeral services providers at <https://www.ncid.sg/For-General->

[Public/Pages/List-of-Funeral-Service-Companies-Trained-in-Basic-Infection-Control-Course-\(BICC\).aspx](#)

- b. Double-bag the body in heavy duty plastic body bags before placing it in a sealed coffin.
- c. Hermetically seal the coffin at the joints with silicone.
- d. The lid of the coffin is not to be opened at any time.
- e. Additional conditions/ precautions may be imposed, where appropriate.

More information is available on NEA website at <https://www.nea.gov.sg/our-services/after-death/post-death-matters/when-death-occurs/overseas>.

CREMATION & IMPORTATION OF ASHES INTO SINGAPORE

If it is decided to cremate the body overseas and import the ashes, the following documents are required to bring the ashes back to Singapore:

a. Death Certificate

The death certificate should indicate the following:

- Deceased's name (Ensure that the name is in English as indicated in the passport);
- Nationality;
- Passport number;
- Date of death; and
- Cause of death

b. Cremation Certificate

The ashes should be placed in a covered container and accompanied by the death certificate and cremation certificate of the deceased. There is no requirement for a permit to bring ashes into Singapore. If the NOK would like to hand-carry the ashes onboard the plane, they should first check with the airline if it is permissible. Please note that commercial courier companies (e.g. DHL, FedEx, UPS, etc.) generally do not courier human remains. The NOK is advised to check with a funeral services provider how they might courier the remains back to Singapore.

When choosing an urn, the NOK may wish to take into consideration the size of the niche in the Columbarium where the urn would be placed. For example, the dimensions of a standard niche at Choa Chu Kang Columbarium are 245 mm (width) x 230 mm (height) x 250 mm (depth).

Other Relevant Information

Under the Infectious Act, Sect 43. — (1) No corpse or human remains or bones other than **cremated ashes**, shall be brought into or transhipped or exported from Singapore, unless accompanied by a medical certificate or other evidence showing the name of the deceased, the date and cause of death and the measures adopted to preserve the body.

There are no restrictions on bringing the ashes of a deceased who suffered from an infectious condition back to Singapore.

HOW TO REPORT AN OVERSEAS DEATH IN SINGAPORE

The NOK must register the death with and obtain a death certificate from the foreign authorities in the country/place where the death occurred.

Upon returning to Singapore, the NOK has to report the death of the deceased to the Registry of Births & Deaths. The report can also be done by proxy with a letter of authorisation from the deceased's family. There is no specified time frame for the reporting of overseas death.

The following documents are to be provided when reporting the death:

- Death certificate issued by the foreign authorities or a certified true copy of the death certificate (an English-translated copy certified by a notary public is required if the death certificate is not in English)
- Coffin (Import/Export) permit (if available)
- Permit to Bury/Cremate (if available)
- Deceased's Singapore identity card, passport, or citizenship certificate; and
- NOK's identification documents (IC, passport, or citizenship certificate).

The NOK may report the death and submit the required documents via the link:
<https://go.gov.sg/report-overseas-death>.

Alternatively, the NOK can email the required documents to ICA_DPU_RBD@ica.gov.sg, or submit the required documents by post or in person at:

Registry of Births and Deaths
Citizen Services Centre
ICA Building
10 Kallang Road, Level 3
Singapore 208718
(next to Lavender MRT station)

Operating hours are 8.00 am - 4.30 pm on Monday to Friday, and 8.00 am - 12.30 pm on Saturday.

More information is available on ICA website at
https://www.ica.gov.sg/documents/death/death_overseas.

INFORMATION ON OTHER POST-DEATH MATTERS

For information on what to do when your loved one passes away and to find a funeral director in Singapore, you may visit the website of the Association of Funeral Directors Singapore (AFD) at <https://afd.org.sg/>. For information on burial, crematorium, columbarium and other after-death matters, you may refer to the NEA website at <https://www.nea.gov.sg/our-services/after-death/post-death-matters/burial-cremation-and-ash-storage>.