



### Alternative testing

If you decide that you do not wish for your baby to have a full post mortem, there are alternatives you may like to consider. These will not give as much detailed information as a full post mortem and can include things such as your baby being examined externally, x-rays or clinical photographs. You can discuss these options with your midwife or doctor.

We hope that this booklet has provided the information you need to help you make the decision that is right for you and your family.



### Further support

There are Sands groups around the country offering support following the death of a baby. For contact details of your closest group please visit our website [www.sands.org.nz](http://www.sands.org.nz) or call 0800 Sands4u (726374).



# Sands

Sands New Zealand is a network of parent-run, non-profit groups supporting families who have experienced the death of a baby. We have over 25 groups around the country.

All of the people involved in Sands give their time and energy voluntarily - we are not a government funded organisation. We do not have any paid staff. Most of our members/supporters are also bereaved parents.

To find your local Sands group visit [www.sands.org.nz/supportgroups.html](http://www.sands.org.nz/supportgroups.html)

We also provide a closed bereaved parent chat page on facebook — [www.facebook.com/groups/SandsNewZealand.Bereaved.Parents/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SandsNewZealand.Bereaved.Parents/)



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# Sands

# Post Mortem

## A guide for parents and their family

## **You have been given this booklet because your baby or child has died. Sands New Zealand would like to express our sympathy to you and your family during this extremely difficult time.**

We understand that this is a heartbreaking time for you and you may find it difficult to know what to do. This booklet has been written to give you clear information about a post mortem and its potential value. We hope that it will help you understand the reasons for undertaking such an examination, and what it involves.

Please take time to read through this booklet and discuss it with your family if you wish, before you complete the post mortem consent form. If you have any further questions or if anything is unclear, your midwife, doctor or bereavement team are there to help you.

The main thing to remember is that you can ask as many questions as you like to make sure you come to the decision that is right for you and your family. Hospital staff are there to help you. This is the only time available to you for creating tangible memories before your baby or child's funeral so it is important that you do not feel rushed into making any decisions.

### **What is a post mortem?**

A post mortem (also called an autopsy) is performed by a trained pathologist (doctor) who examines the internal and external tissues and organs of a baby.

A post mortem may provide information about the cause of a baby's death that would not otherwise be discovered. It can give families a better understanding of why their baby died and assess the chances of it happening again. It is also possible for information gained to benefit other families who may suffer from similar problems.

### **Where does a Post Mortem take place?**

Post mortems take place in a mortuary and take approximately 3 hours. Usually post mortems are performed in Wellington, Christchurch or Auckland.

If for any reason your baby must be returned to you within a certain time frame, please let your doctor or bereavement team know beforehand and they will take all steps possible to ensure your baby is returned in time. If this is not possible they will discuss the options with you prior to your decision.

### **Can I be present during a post mortem?**

Parents are not permitted in the examination room during the post mortem. Should you wish to travel with your baby you will need to cover the cost of your own travel. There is no cost for your baby's travel.

### **Who else is present at the post mortem?**

The pathologist is helped by other staff, usually at least one mortuary technician. Sometimes medical students, doctors and other health care professionals may attend a post mortem examination for training purposes.

### **What happens during a post mortem?**

In a full post mortem your baby will be photographed (you can request these photos; however they are clinical in appearance). Your baby will also be measured, examined externally and x-rayed. The incisions will then be made – one on the back of the head above the hairline and a 'y' shaped incision on the chest and abdomen.

These enable the pathologist to examine your baby internally. Small samples of tissue will be taken for microscopic examination. After examining your baby's organs they will be returned to the body, the incisions are closed and a dressing will be placed over the incisions. Your baby will be dressed before being returned. All babies are cared for with the utmost dignity throughout the process.

### **What happens next?**

Your doctor, midwife or bereavement team will discuss arrangements with you if you wish to see your baby once he/she has returned. Please be aware that your baby's skin colour and general appearance do change naturally after death. Your baby's skin is very fragile and soft and it is normal for your baby to leak fluid. This is not due to the post mortem itself. Your baby will be dressed following the post mortem, however you are welcome to provide your own baby clothes to dress your baby in. You may take your baby home with you following the post mortem to further your memory making. Alternatively you may prefer for your baby to remain at the mortuary until the funeral.

### **The results**

A report will be written up detailing what has been found by the post mortem. This may take several weeks depending on what tests may be needed to give the most accurate results.

Your specialist will make an appointment to sit down and go through the report with you. During this appointment you may be referred to other specialists depending on the results. Please understand that even with a full post mortem, the cause of your baby's death may not be found.