



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Fiji - Bereavement information pack

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Bereavement information pack

Consular guidance & local information

The death of a relative or a friend is always a distressing experience. When the death occurs overseas, family and friends can feel additional distress as they are unfamiliar with procedures abroad. You may be uncertain about what to do next or who to contact for advice. Consular Directorate of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and our High Commission in Fiji are ready to help and provide advice as far as they can. We offer help which is appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case. We will make an assessment of your needs, based on who you are, where you are, and what other support is available to you. Our assessment will help us define the type of support that we can offer.

Guidance on practical support British consular staff can provide in the event of an accidental death, death in hospital, murder or manslaughter abroad, and what you will need to do, can be found in our publications '[Death overseas](#)' and '[Guide for bereaved families](#)'.

Whilst care has been taken in compiling this document, the contents are not meant to be a definitive statement of the law, nor are they to be taken as a substitute for independent legal advice.

The use of the terms body, body parts, remains, deceased etc. are not meant to offend you in any way. We realise that we are referring to your loved one and we mean no disrespect to the person you have lost.

The Commonwealth of Fiji – understanding the state system

The Commonwealth of Fiji operates a federal system of government under which powers are divided between a central government and provincial states. The fifteen provincial states have their own state constitution, which divides the state's government into the divisions of legislature, executive, and judiciary. This means that depending where a person dies the coronial process will be handled by an individual State Judicial system.

There are fifteen provincial states in Fiji are Ba, Labasa, Lautoka, Levuka, Nadi, Nasinu, Nausori, Navua, Savusavu, Sigatoka, Suva, Tailevu, Taveuni, Tavua and Rakiraki

It is important that you take advice from our Consular staff in order to understand the particular state procedures.

You can contact the appropriate member of the consular staff in Fiji [here](#).

Next of kin

When someone dies in Fiji and the next of kin is in the UK or abroad, Fijian authorities normally notify the British High Commission. The High Commission will do whatever they can to trace the next of kin as soon as possible and would ask the UK police to pass on the sad news. However you might also be notified about the death directly by someone else, for example a doctor, a social worker or a police officer.

In Fiji the seniority of next of kin is usually as follows:

- Spouse/Partner/Civil Partner
- Adult child (i.e. over 18 years old)
- Parent
- Adult sibling (i.e. over 18 years old)
- An adult with sufficient relationship to the deceased

An ex-partner is not regarded as next of kin.

Same-sex relationships: Fijian federal law prohibits the recognition of overseas same-sex marriages. UK civil partnership and same-sex marriage documentation isn't as widely accepted in Fiji as in the UK.

When necessary, we can issue a document to people who find themselves in situations where the local authorities do not recognise their status as next of kin, which states that the UK will normally view a same sex spouse or civil partner as next of kin in the same way that we would view opposite sex couples as next of kin. There is however no guarantee that a foreign authority will take the same view.

Appointing a funeral director

A relative or a formally appointed representative must instruct a local funeral director in Fiji or an international funeral director in the UK for a body to be repatriated to the UK, or buried or cremated in Fiji. However if the deceased was insured you should immediately contact the insurance company to establish if they are able to cover for the repatriation expenses and make the necessary arrangements. You may need the insurance policy number and the associated 24hr medical emergency contact number to do this. If the travel insurance company confirm that there is a current policy, **you should not appoint your own funeral director or be pressurised by local funeral agencies to do so.** It will be the insurance company that will appoint the funeral director both locally and in the UK.

If there is no insurance cover, unfortunately funds for repatriation or burial will need to be met by the family. Neither the Foreign & Commonwealth Office nor our British High Commission in Fiji have budgets to meet these costs. See our separate list of [UK international funeral directors and the Fiji funeral directors associations.](#)

In Fiji, it is not normally necessary for the deceased to be identified by the next of kin. Identification can be carried out by means of documentation such as a passport or driving licence or by fingerprints, dental records or DNA.

Local death certificate

Local undertakers will register the death with the relevant state authorities and will arrange for a Fijian death certificate to accompany the remains.

In order to register the death the funeral director will ask you for some information. This is likely to be:

Full name of the deceased, gender, date of birth (if born outside Fijian town and city of birth), date and place of death, residential address, usual occupation, whether married, father's full name and occupation, and mother's full names and occupation.

We strongly advise requesting copies of the international death certificate when discussing repatriation arrangements with the international or the local undertaker. However if you need to obtain copies direct from the state government where the person died, contact the relevant state [Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages](#).

Although not obligatory, it is possible to register the death of a British national who has died in Fiji with UK authorities. See full information on how to apply for the registration of a death [here](#).

British passport cancellation

In order to avoid identity fraud a deceased person's passport should be sent to Her Majesty's Passport Office in the UK, or to the nearest British High Commission in Fiji together with the death certificate and [D01 form](#). Next of kin can request the passport to be returned after cancellation. Likewise, if the passport has been lost or mislaid, relatives should get in contact with either the nearest High Commission or passport office for instructions on reporting the loss of the passport.

Repatriation to the UK

If the deceased was covered by travel insurance, the insurance company will normally have a standing agreement with an international funeral director in the UK to arrange repatriation. If the deceased was not covered by insurance, you will need to appoint a local undertaker in Fiji or an international funeral director in the UK.

The majority of undertakers in Fiji are equipped to carry out repatriation procedures and will provide full information about the process. Although the undertaker cannot begin preparing the body until the local Coroner has released the body, the funeral director can provide guidance and can organise the necessary Fijian documents. Embalming, which is a more complicated procedure, is optional and is more expensive. Please note that in the case of a sudden death, when a UK Coroner might request an autopsy in the UK, embalming might hinder some of the autopsy results.

If the decision has been made to cremate locally and the next of kin wish to transport the ashes to the UK in person this is possible. Please see our [death abroad](#) guidance. We also advise to check in advance with the airline about specific airline restrictions. If the decision has been made to transport the ashes unaccompanied you will need the assistance of a funeral director as neither Fijian Post nor the Royal Mail will carry human remains.

Clothing and personal belongings

Personal belongings found on the deceased at the time of death are either handed over to the family, if they are present, or taken by the police. If the next of kin chooses repatriation, it is advisable to instruct the local undertaker to collect the belongings from the police and to ship personal belongings together with the body. If there is an investigation into the death, the deceased's clothing can be retained as evidence and is not returned until the court case is finished.

Local burial

If you choose a local burial, you will need to instruct a local funeral director and they can make the necessary arrangements with either a private or government owned cemetery. A ceremony can be organised by the funeral director or a registered celebrant. You can make specific arrangements depending on your cultural and/or religious beliefs.

Local cremation

Cremation is common practice in Fiji. If you are thinking of arranging a local cremation, please take advice from your local funeral director. Most crematoriums in Fiji are able to host a funeral services, you can make specific arrangements with your funeral director depending on your cultural and/or religious beliefs. Many local council authorities allow for ashes to be scattered in publically owned areas but you should contact the presiding council to comply with any local restrictions.

Autopsy / Post-Mortem

An Autopsy, which is also known as a Post-mortem, is normally performed in all cases and certainly when the death is not by natural causes. A doctor in a state hospital may also request a post-mortem for a death by natural causes when the cause of death is unclear.

Post-mortems are carried out by forensic doctors appointed by the hospital or by the court sometimes called pathologists. During a post-mortem, small tissue samples and organs may be removed and retained for testing, including toxicological studies. This is done in order to better understand the cause of death and to evaluate any disease or injury that might be present. It can be crucial to establish cause of death in cases where criminal or civil legal procedures may eventuate.

It is possible for the next of kin to object to an autopsy taking place or to request an external only or partial autopsy. The Coroner will take into account cultural or religious sensitivities. Coronial staff will often contact next of kin to explain the need for an autopsy and to inform them of the possible complications in the event that one is not undertaken. This can result in a death certificate having limited information as to cause of death which can impact on matters involving travel insurance and estate settlement. In the case of a homicide the Coroners in Fiji will override such requests and proceed.

In some cases it may be necessary to have a further autopsy in the UK even though one has been carried out overseas and, when repatriation is to England or Wales, it is probable that the Coroner will wish to hold an inquest.

Inquests

In Fiji, usually a magistrate, will investigate deaths that are 'unnatural' such as accidents, suicides or homicides; deaths that have occurred in prison or in care, or have unknown causes. A Coroner will investigate the circumstances surrounding the death to find out the identity of the deceased person, when and where they died, how they died and the medical cause of death. The Coroner may decide to hold an inquest to gather more information about the cause and circumstances of a death. An inquest must be held in certain circumstances, for example, if the death is in custody. In other cases, the Coroner might decide to hold an inquest if it is in the public interest. For example, where there is significant doubt about the facts or if holding an inquest might help prevent future deaths.

Release of information

Access to information concerning a death is restricted until a Coroner has reviewed the evidence such as post-mortem and police reports. The Fijian authorities will usually not provide this information directly to next of kin, or to third parties, including our High Commission, until after the conclusion of the preliminary investigation. The release of any information will usually take several months and in some more complicated instances, years.

Organ donation

In Fiji we do not donate organs and tissue after death.

Donation of bodies to medical science

In Fiji we do not donate a body to medical science after death.

UK Coroners

The Coroner in England and Wales is obliged by law to hold an inquest into the cause of any unnatural or violent death of a person whose remains lie in his or her area, even if the death occurred overseas and a post-mortem has already been carried out before repatriation of the remains to the UK. Coroners may order a second post mortem (i.e. subsequent to the first post mortem carried out abroad), as part of the inquest and it is at this stage that families are often made aware that organs have been removed and not replaced. Coroners can request copies of post-mortem and police reports from the Papua New Guinean authorities via the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. However, these will only be provided once any judicial proceedings are completed. In some instances this can take many months. UK Coroners can compel witnesses to give evidence from England and Wales but not from abroad.

In Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) deals with the investigation of all sudden, suspicious, accidental, unexpected and unexplained deaths which occur in Scotland. However, the COPFS does not have the jurisdiction to investigate deaths that occur outside Scotland apart from in a few limited circumstances. Generally, those circumstances include terrorism, cases where the death may have been caused in Scotland but the person died outside Scotland and cases where the death was as a result of murder or culpable homicide caused by another British citizen or subject.

Coroners in Northern Ireland are not obliged to hold an inquest into cause of death. However, next of kin can apply for a judicial review if no inquest is held.

There will be no Coroner's inquest when the remains are buried or cremated locally. Further information about the role of UK Coroners is available on the FCO publication: Guide for Bereaved Families.

Legal aid/assistance

Legal Aid is a Government legal service dealing mainly with family law and criminal legal matters. They provide free legal advice as well as court representation, and grants of legal aid funds to pay for a legal aid lawyer or a private solicitor. For further information on this, or how to find a lawyer if you need one, see our [list of lawyers](#).

Additional support

There are a number of organisations in the UK that can help bereaved families and friends come to terms with their loss, whether the death was natural or otherwise. Where the death was a result of murder or manslaughter, if you wish, we can put you in touch with the Victim Support National Homicide Service, who will allocate a named caseworker to give you free and confidential help. Charities such as Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM Abroad) – www.sammabroad.org.uk - can help you face the problems and difficulties that arise from a death overseas under suspicious circumstances.

We also have a leaflet called '[Victims of crime abroad](#)' which you may find helpful.