



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Burial on private land

Information for families who are considering the return of their baby's remains/pregnancy tissue, for burial on land which is not a recognised cemetery or churchyard

This information outlines what happens when you ask for the return of your baby's remains/pregnancy tissue when you have chosen to have the burial on a piece of land other than a recognised cemetery or churchyard. If you have any further questions after reading this information, please contact your named nurse/midwife or a hospital chaplain.

I want to make my own arrangement, but don't know how I will feel?

You may wish to make your own arrangements for your baby's remains/pregnancy tissue but feel understandably anxious about how you might feel. Please ask the staff at the hospital who can offer counselling and practical help where necessary.

Are there any legal implications?

There are no specific legal requirements when considering a burial in your own garden, or other premises. However, this may be a legal oversight and we therefore recommend that both the hospital and the Environmental Health Office of your local council are consulted about this issue. The Environmental Health Office can offer specialist advice and inform you of local issues.

These recommendations apply to baby's remains/ any pregnancy tissue stored in formalin and also blocks and slides. Blocks are tissue samples stored in wax and slides are sections of tissue samples mounted on glass slides.

What this means for you:

The Environmental Health Officer will inform you of any by-laws or local regulations. The main points to consider are:

- Danger must not be caused to others.
- The burial must not interfere with any rights that others have on the land.
- There must be no danger of contamination to water supplies or watercourses.
- There must be no chance of fluids leaking into or onto adjoining land.
- The burial should take place at a depth of 18in (45cm) (RCN Guidelines "Sensitive Disposal of all Fetal Remains).
- Permission should be gained from the landowner.

- You may consider recording in the deeds of the property that remains are buried in the private garden.
- The value of the property may decrease.
- If the site is to be marked, consideration must be given to neighbours who might find this distressing.
- You may also wish to give careful thought whether to have a burial in a residential garden. Consider what your wishes would be for your baby's remains if you were to move house or if in the future, the land were to be used for a new purpose.

How will my baby's remains or any pregnancy tissue be returned to me?

Your baby's remains and/or pregnancy tissue can be returned to you directly from the ward/delivery suite or via a nominated funeral director, who can help guide you. If you wish to take your baby's remains or any pregnancy tissue from the hospital, they must be placed in a suitable container for transportation. Please ask the staff caring for you for help with this

We will negotiate with the funeral director or yourselves, an appropriate date and time for collection. Your baby's remains/pregnancy tissue will be released through the hospital mortuary or can be released directly from Delivery Suite/ward if they have not been to the histology department (Pathology) and/or mortuary. You will be required to sign a release form which the staff can help you with.

How are my baby's remains or any pregnancy tissue prepared for return?

If your baby's remains/pregnancy tissue have been to the histology department the, the laboratory staff will need some time to prepare for their return. All remains of tissue or "fixed" tissues are stored in a chemical called formalin. This chemical has Health and Safety implications for anybody that handles it; therefore, it has to be removed before any remains can be returned.

Once the formalin has been removed, the tissues are washed in water. The tissues will be wrapped in absorbent paper and placed in plastic, before it is placed into the container or casket of your choice.

If blocks and slides are to be returned, these are counted and then placed in the casket. The casket is then sealed.

What Health and Safety issues should I be aware of?

Formalin is a toxic substance and the handling of tissues that have been stored in this way must be done with care. Only under exceptional circumstances will the tissues be released in formalin. There may also be some residual formalin still present in the washed tissues, therefore a Health and Safety leaflet will be provided to inform you about the safe handling of such tissue.

Any tissues that were frozen must be fixed in formalin and washed before they are returned, as they may constitute a health risk when defrosted.

A Health and Safety leaflet will also be provided, to assist you with the handling of the blocks and slides.

What happens if I change my mind?

If you are unable to make the arrangements as planned or no longer feel this is the right choice for you, you may contact either the hospital or local funeral director, both of whom will be able to offer advice on other options available.

If any other questions arise you can contact your nurse/midwife or the hospital chaplain.

Useful numbers

- Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) 0118 322 5111 (Switchboard)
- RBH Bereavement midwives 07500 123 912/rbft.bereavementmidwives@nhs.net
- RBH Mortuary 0118 322 7743
- RBH Bereavement Department 0118 322 7059 (Mon-Fri 8am-4pm)
- Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management Tel: 020 8989 4661
- Reading Borough Council, Environmental Health Tel: 0800 626 540
- For details of local regulations, please contact the local Department of the Environment or a funeral director.

Maternity, May 2020

Review due: May 2022