



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Burial on private land

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

This information aims to explain what happens when you ask for the return of your baby's remains 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?

The hospital appreciates that the decision to deal with the return of the baby's remains themselves lies with the family. However, you should be aware that the return of such remains may reawaken feelings of grief and loss. We would therefore advise you to consider the matter of handling the tissues yourself very carefully. The hospital 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 tissues 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. What would your wishes 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 the tissues be returned to me?

The hospital suggests that tissues are returned to families via a nominated funeral director, as they have expert knowledge on the handling of tissues. However, you may make your own arrangements with the hospital if you wish.

If you decide to collect the tissues from the hospital, they must be placed in a suitable container for transportation. If you choose to nominate a funeral director, they will advise you on the handling of the tissues. They can also provide a simple casket if you wish.

We will negotiate with the funeral director, or the family, an appropriate date and time for the collection. The tissues will be released through the hospital mortuary. Although every effort is made to meet the requests of families, the laboratory staff do need time to prepare the tissues. The relevant paperwork will also need to be prepared and signed before the hand over.

How are the tissues prepared for 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 wish to deal with this yourself, 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.
- 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 2018

Review due: May 2020