

SPOKANE COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

Statement of Policy, Procedure and Practice

Policy Title: **REQUEST FOR PATERNITY TESTING**

Policy:

The Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office does not perform paternity testing. Blood samples which may be suitable for paternity testing by an appropriate laboratory are commonly collected during postmortem examination. The Medical Examiner cannot guarantee the suitability of samples. These samples, if not needed for other death investigation or legal purposes may, with proper authorization, be made available for independent testing.

Release of samples requires written authorization from the next-of-kin of the deceased, a court order, or subpoena.

Procedures and Practices:

When a request for paternity testing is received:

- The requesting individual should be informed that the Medical Examiner's Office does not perform such testing and that special legal and laboratory arrangements need to be made.
- The individual should be notified that frozen blood samples obtained during postmortem examination are routinely held for a three year period from the time of the original examination, and are disposed of as BIOHAZARDOUS material after that period of time. Blood cards may also be suitable specimens and are kept indefinitely (histology blocks are retained indefinitely, and slides are stored indefinitely).
- The Medical Examiner's Office records and materials should be checked by one of the Autopsy Assistants or a Death Investigator to see what samples are available for potential release.
- Written authorization from the next-of-kin of the deceased, a court order, or proper legal subpoena is required before samples can be released for testing. Requesting individuals should also be informed that they are responsible for any and all costs associated with transfers and testing of samples. The Medical Examiner's Office charges a handling/Administrative fee, and must receive the fee before transferring any samples for testing. The testing laboratory submits a separate bill to the requesting individual/agency.

- The request and related authorization are to be reviewed by the acting Chief Medical Examiner or a Medical Examiner prior to release. If proper written authorization is received, the transfer of samples should be done with written documentation utilizing a *Chain of Evidence Form*.
- The Medical Examiner's Office will submit specimens directly to the testing agency as per their sample requirements.
- The Medical Examiner's Office will not "hold" any specimens beyond the limits described in separate policy ("Storage, Retention, and Disposal of Items of Evidence"). If an attorney/agency, etc. requests samples be held for the potential of later paternity testing, they will be informed of the office retention policy and advised to arrange for specimen storage elsewhere. Under the appropriate authority and with correct documentation and "Chain of Custody", specimens will be shipped for storage at their direction and expense.
- All documentation is kept as a permanent record in the corresponding case file.

Sally Aiken MD
 Sally Aiken, M.D.
 Medical Examiner

9/23/19
 Date

John D. Howard
 John D. Howard, M.D.
 Medical Examiner

9/24/2019
 Date

Implemented: Nov 2003 **Revised:** March 2008; March 2010; July 2012; Sept 2013; August 2015; December 2017; September 2019

Computer File Name: Request for paternity testing