

# Monterey County EMS System Policy



Policy Number: 4100  
Effective Date: 7/1/2024  
Review Date: 6/30/2027

## PRE-HOSPITAL DETERMINATION OF DEATH

### I. PURPOSE

To establish medical criteria for determination of death.

### II. POLICY

- A. If there is any doubt about the patient meeting the criteria for determination of death, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) shall be initiated.
- B. In all cases where death has been determined, the coroner or law enforcement agency with jurisdiction shall be notified. A first responder or ambulance provider shall remain on scene until released by either law enforcement or a coroner's office representative.
- C. The decision regarding determination of death shall be made at the scene before transport. Once transport has been initiated, resuscitative efforts shall continue until patient care is transferred to the receiving hospital.
- D. Base contact is required for any deviations from this policy, or for determination of death based on criteria not specifically outlined in this policy.

### III. PROCEDURE

- A. Signs of Obvious Death.
  - 1. Decapitation.
  - 2. Incineration.
  - 3. Rigor Mortis.
  - 4. Post-Mortem lividity.
  - 5. Decomposition.
  - 6. Separation of vital organs from the body or destruction of organs that is obviously incompatible with life, and the absence of life signs.
- B. Other Criteria for Determination of Death.
  - 1. Absence of life signs when there are multiple victims and resuscitation would hinder care of more viable patients.
  - 2. The patient is pulseless and apneic with a valid Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order, or the legal durable power of attorney directs that resuscitative measures not be provided.
  - 3. Patient in cardiac arrest and a persistent non-shockable rhythm despite Advanced Life Support (ALS) interventions for 20 minutes and up to 3 rounds of drugs in accordance with the Asystole/Pulseless Electrical Activity (PEA) protocol.

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4. Patient meets criteria under Policy #4504 Drowning and Non-Fatal Drowning.
- C. Upon EMS arrival, patients found to be in cardiac arrest due to a major traumatic injury where the initial cardiac rhythm is asystole or PEA with a rate of less than 20 bpm.
- D. Death Scene Management.
1. Request the response of the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction and Coroner office notification.
  2. The individual with Incident Command responsibility shall be responsible for the deceased until law enforcement or a coroner deputy arrives . The body may be released to family or responsible party, such as the patient's caregiver or funeral home, with verbal approval of a coroner's representative when an extended response time from law enforcement or coroner's representative will delay the return to service by EMS personnel.
  3. The deceased shall not be moved except when the body hinders the care of other patients or when the coroner's office releases the body.
  4. EMS personnel shall not search the deceased for identification or other information.
  5. EMS personnel shall take reasonable precautions to not disturb the scene or immediate surroundings of the deceased except as needed to perform patient care activities. Notification shall be made to law enforcement or coroner deputy regarding any disturbance of the scene.

### IV. NOTES

- A. When a patient meets the criteria for determination of death and CPR has been started by a member of the public, CPR may be stopped by EMS personnel. Base contact is not required.
- B. ALS personnel shall provide EKG documentation on the Patient Care Report (PCR) when the patient is placed on the heart monitor.
- C. ALS personnel may stop CPR started by Basic Life Support (BLS) personnel if the patient meets the criteria for determination of death.

**END OF POLICY**

  
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