



Deaths abroad of children under 18 years of age and normally resident in the United Kingdom. Guidance Document for Child Death Overview Panels in England and information for those working in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

The death of a child is a devastating loss that profoundly affects bereaved parents as well as siblings, grandparents, extended family, friends and professionals who were involved in caring for the child in any capacity.^[1]

The UK's four Nations – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – each have systems and guidance when children under the age of 18 years old die. When a child dies abroad additional challenges may arise and this document aims to provide Child Death Overview Panels (CDOPs) in England and respective Organisations in the other three Nations, with relevant information and access to support. To ensure better understanding of how and why children die, identify modifiable factors and take forward learning that could reduce the risk of a similar death occurring in the future.

[1] [Child Death Review Statutory and Operational Guidance \(England\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
(publishing.service.gov.uk)

INTRODUCTION

The circumstances whereby children may die abroad will vary, for instance, the death may occur whilst they are visiting family members, or they may be on holiday. These different circumstances may affect both the statutory response and the family's decision making at an incredibly traumatic time.

This guidance document is designed for use by professionals working within Child Death Overview Panels (CDOPs) in England to support them when a child aged under 18 and usually resident in their area dies abroad.

There is also information included for professionals working within Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, where processes for reviewing child deaths may vary.



The guidance includes:

1. An overview of the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office processes.
2. Examples of good practice and suggested action that local areas can take when a child dies abroad.
3. Addressing modifiable factors identified in child deaths abroad and examples of preventative approaches to reduce future deaths.
4. An overview of processes followed in several other countries when a child dies.
5. Frequently asked questions.

Overview of the process

The processes that happens when a child dies abroad depends on the country in which the death occurs. England is one of the few countries in the world to have a statutory, country wide Child Death Review (CDR) process for all babies and children aged under 18 years old. For CDOPs accessing information about how and why a child died can be challenging. Chapter 7 of the National Child Death Review Statutory and Operational Guidance includes the processes to be followed when a child normally resident in England dies abroad.

In England it is expected that the Child Death Review (CDR) partners, via their CDOPs will review each death of a child normally resident in the area, including if they die abroad. These processes will differ for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

As the experience of the working party for this document showed CDOPs may learn about such a death from a variety of sources (e.g. Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), media, coroner, public or from the family informing their GP or another agency). The notification of these deaths may be months after the death has occurred.

If the death is sudden and unexpected and has taken place abroad then in England CDOPs are advised to seek advice from local police, health, social care regarding which elements of the JAR may be appropriate, even if the notification has been delayed. In other Nations safeguarding responses should be considered. It is also important to contact the local Coroner in England and Wales and the Lord Advocate in Scotland, although they might not always be involved. In England and Wales this is because the duties of the Coroner are engaged when the body of the deceased person is lying within their area, these duties therefore only arise in respect of children who die abroad and whose bodies are returned. The duties of the local Coroner do not arise if the child is buried or cremated abroad. Where the body is returned home, the Coroner taking responsibility will usually be the Coroner covering the area to which the child's body is brought for funeral arrangements.

In Northern Ireland Coroners have no jurisdiction for a death which occurred outside Northern Ireland. In Scotland the Lord Advocate, who is head of the system for investigating deaths in Scotland, decides whether a Fatal Accident Inquiry is needed.

Overview of the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office processes

The investigation of deaths that occur abroad by the local coroner in England and Wales is often difficult due to problems securing evidence. The FCDO usually assists by contacting foreign authorities on behalf of the Coroner, as the Coroner has no power to summon evidence or witnesses outside England and Wales.

Such reviews require careful coordination to ensure that relevant information from the FCDO, international funeral directors, coroner, and local services (health, education, police, social services) is presented to the panel.

The FCDO can provide support to British nationals in difficulties abroad, such as families whose child has died, and provides useful resources for what should happen in the event of a death abroad.[1] If a child who is a British national, dies abroad, the child's family are advised to notify the local authorities and the UK Embassy, High Commission, or Consulate in the country where the child has died.[2]

The family can also contact the FCDO directly.

Diplomatic officials in these offices will, when notified of a death, advise relatives how to register the death (abroad and/or in the UK); advise on how to repatriate the body using local or international funeral directors, and give guidance relating to bereavement support. Their staff will also notify the coronial liaison officer at the FCDO. The FCDO collects routine information about each death such as name, date of birth, address, known cause of death, and the welfare of other siblings.

[1] The FCDO can be contacted on Coroner.LiaisonOfficer@fcdo.gov.uk, or in an emergency 0207 008 1500 (ask for Consular)

[2] What to do after someone dies: What to do if someone dies abroad - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Overview of the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office processes

It is good practice for the FCDO to also notify the relevant CDOP or Child Death Review contacts where the child was normally resident, if a UK address is provided to them. The FCDO will only be aware of a death if the family, foreign authority or other interested party notifies them, usually through a British embassy or consulate in the country of the death. In England local CDOPs report that they are less likely to gain information, if the FCDO have not been informed first. The child or young person must have a British passport.

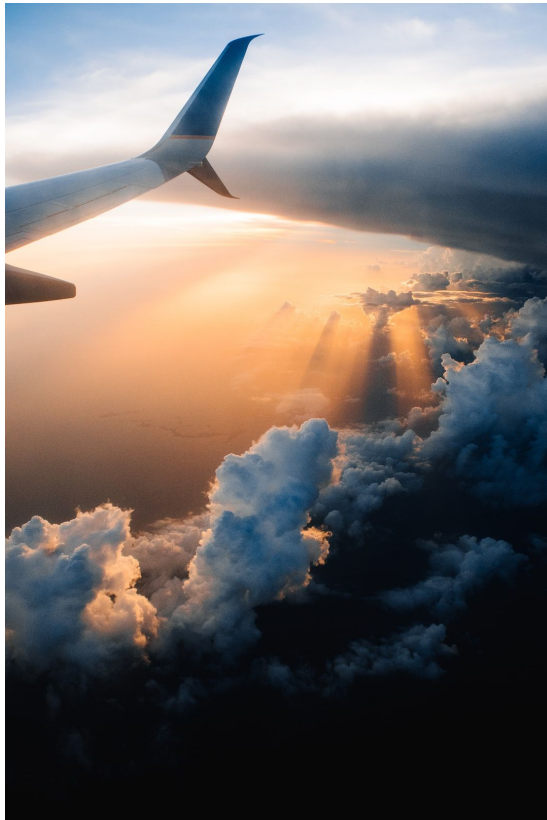
There are times that it is not possible for the FCDO to obtain more information from the country of a British child's death, please read Appendix A which can be found within the ACDRP documents for more details. If the child was not a British passport holder, the CDOP needs to seek support from the relevant foreign embassy (usually based in London) of the child's nationality, which the FCDO can also advise on the contact details for.



Overview of the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office processes

It is good practice for the FCDO to also notify the relevant CDOP or other Nation contact where the child was normally resident, if a UK address is provided to them.

In England CDOPs have found that other countries are unlikely, if at all, to offer information without a passport number that would need to be obtained from the family with their consent.



Flowchart for England the role of CDOP when a child dies abroad

Child dies abroad

The relevant UK Embassy should be informed by the relevant foreign authority of the country that the death occurred in. The relevant UK Embassy should then contact the FCDO's Coroner Liaison Officer (CLO).

Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office are not notified.

CDOP is notified by another route.

Child Policy Unit and the relevant CDOP professionals are notified.

CDOP should notify FCDO CLO to ensure enquiries can be made to access documentation required.

If the death is sudden and unexpected and has taken place abroad then local CDOPs are advised to seek advice from local police, health, social care regarding which elements of the JAR may be appropriate. This consideration of a JAR or early response meeting may support understanding when a family are returning home and the support they might need.

Ensure a key worker is assigned to the families.

Ensure families have registered the death. The death is registered in the country where the death occurred.

FCDO staff may be able to attend Child Death Review Meetings, it is important to plan for a time when they may be able to attend due to time differences in other countries.

At the end of the information process, CDOPs can still review cases, even in instances of minimal information. These issues around access to information should be recorded on the appropriate analysis form, as well as highlighting where local CDOPs have identified areas which would make the process better or easier nationally and locally.

Flowchart for Wales child death reviews when a child dies abroad

Child dies abroad

The relevant UK Embassy should be informed by the relevant foreign authority of the country that the death occurred in. The relevant UK Embassy should then contact the FCDO's Coroner Liaison Officer (CLO).

Child Policy Unit and Child Death Review Programme (Wales) are notified if the child was a Welsh resident.
(childdeath.review@wales.nhs.uk)

Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office are not notified.

National Child Death Review Programme (Wales) are notified by another route.

National Child Death Review Programme should notify FCDO CLO to ensure enquiries can be made to access documentation required.

If the death is sudden and unexpected and has taken place abroad then the Child Death Review Programme are advised to inform Police and safeguarding who will consider implementing the PRUDiC procedure as far as is practically possible and fully record any decisions made. If a decision is made for PRUDiC not to occur then the conversation should also include what support is needed for the family and wider community and referrals for support made. If PRUDiC occurs, a single point of contact for supporting the family is determined at the first meeting.

If deemed appropriate by the PRUDiC chair, FCDO staff may be able to attend meetings, it is important to plan for a time when they may be able to attend due to time differences in other countries.

At the end of the information process, the Child Death Review Programme can still review cases, even in the instances of minimal information. These issues around access to information should be recorded, as well as highlighting areas which would make the process better or easier nationally and locally.

Flowchart for Northern Ireland child death reviews when a child dies abroad

Child dies abroad



The relevant UK Embassy should be informed by the relevant foreign authority of the country that the death occurred in. The relevant UK Embassy should then contact the FCDO's Coroner Liaison Officer (CLO).



Child Policy Unit and the Child Death Review Team are notified.

Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office are not notified.



Child Death Review Team are notified by another route.



Child Death Review Team should notify FCDO CLO to ensure enquiries can be made to access documentation required.

Preventing Future Deaths

Between 01/04/2019 and 31/03/2021, there were 6507 deaths of children normally resident in England notified to the National Child Mortality Database. Of these, 67 (1%) were of children who died abroad (outside of England). 57/67 have been reviewed by a CDOP, the most common category of death was Trauma and other external factors (n=27, 47% of deaths that occurred abroad that had been reviewed). Of those deaths categorised as Trauma and other external factors, the most common cause was a vehicle collision (n=17), followed by drowning (n=5)



General Travel Advice

All campaigns and information for families travelling abroad should highlight the importance of appropriate travel insurance, highlighting that families may not purchase travel insurance when they are visiting friends and relatives abroad. This is the second most common reason for travel after holidays. Much of this travel is undertaken by migrants to the UK, or by their UK born families and the travel destinations reflect the country of origin of migrant communities in the UK and include tropical parts of the world where the risk of infectious disease is higher. By contrast, most holiday travel is to destinations which have a similar infectious disease profile to the UK. These travellers often stay longer in their destination than holiday makers and they are more likely to live as part of the local community during their stay. Their risk of acquiring disease is therefore quite different to most holiday makers and highlights the importance of ensuring travel insurance has been purchased.

Visiting Friends and Relatives - Fit for Travel provide information when visiting friends and relatives abroad.

Information on travelling abroad including accessing a Global Health Insurance Card prior to a trip abroad can be found here - Travel Aware – Staying safe and healthy abroad.

Up to date information on vaccinations for countries to be visited can be found here - NaTHNaC - Country List (travelhealthpro.org.uk) since vaccinations may be advisable for some destinations. The age of the child often determines which vaccines they may be able to receive and should have already received as part of the UK Vaccination Schedule. Parents should be made aware that some children may be too young to receive the vaccinations recommended for their chosen destination.

Deaths due to trauma

There are several public health campaigns and information is available for distribution to parents travelling abroad with their child.

i. Road Traffic Accidents (RTA):

Regulations for car seats and seat belt use vary across the world. Many airlines allow families to travel with car seats for free in their luggage allowance. Information is provided by Which? And can be shared with families as part of a holiday campaign, along with advice that whilst some countries may have different rules, best practice would be to use an age appropriate car seat and always wear seat belts. Child Car Seats Laws Around The World - Which?

ii. Drownings:

The Royal Lifesaving Society identified that almost 1 in 4 children (24%) were not able to meet the statutory 'can self-rescue' standard within the Physical Education curriculum. The evidence also showed disparity based on household income, as well as between different ethnic backgrounds, with those from the lowest income families and those from ethnic minorities most likely to fail to reach the statutory standards. There is currently a bill going through parliamentary processes. Water Safety (Curriculum) Bill | Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK)to address this. In addition, more than half of the children who die as a result of drowning were under 4 years old and parents should be aware that many hotels will not have lifeguards on duty. ROSPA offer a fact sheet, which can be shared as part of a summer campaign. Campaigns should also highlight the risks of alcohol affecting parenting behaviour when on holiday and the importance of ensuring there is effective monitoring of children. <https://www.rospa.com/leisure-water-safety/water/advice/holiday-swimming-pool>

Infection

Public Health Scotland provide advice for children travelling abroad. Since children, especially young children may be more likely to be exposed to food and water borne illness during travel due to their natural exploratory nature and hand to mouth habits, the risk of infection may be higher in these groups and details can be found here - [Child Travellers - Fit for Travel](#). Parents should be aware of what to do if their child becomes ill whilst abroad including how to access emergency medical treatment. Parents should be encouraged to try and identify health care facilities prior to departure.

Children with Life Limiting Conditions (LLC)

For children with life limiting conditions who die abroad, and return to England and Wales, their death would be notified to the Coroner because it is the Coroner who issues the funeral paperwork (cremation or burial order). The Coroner in England and Wales may not investigate the death further if it was deemed to be as a result of the child's LLC, as they do not have jurisdiction, but they are notified of the deaths. In England and Wales, the Coroner will review the cause of death provided and decide whether to instruct a Postmortem in England or Wales, in some cases even when one has already been carried out abroad. Families of children with complex medical conditions often don't realise that medical facilities may not be at the same standard in other countries particularly in rural areas. If a family takes a child with a LLC abroad to see family members and the child dies when they are there, the family may wish for them to be buried there and might be well supported by the local community, culture and customs in the immediate aftermath of the death. If they are visiting family, they may well be more familiar with the processes in the country where the child dies than they are with the processes in England and it may be easier for them to navigate those processes if English is not their first language

Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy

Keeping babies cool, access to appropriate equipment and travelling may all impact on sleeping for babies when away from home. Safer sleep advice on whilst on holiday is available for families on the Lullaby Trust website. Baby summer safety – The Lullaby Trust along with their leaflet on Safer Sleep Advice for Emergency Situations. Safer-sleep-for-emergency-situations.pdf (lullabytrust.org.uk)

Child deaths review processes abroad

Leading countries visited by residents of the United Kingdom (UK) in 2019 and 2022 were Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Portugal, United States and Republic of Ireland

FRANCE

If the death occurs naturally a doctor will issue a medical report confirming death (certificat de décès), although it will not show the cause of death.

In the event of a violent death, e.g. suicide or the result of an accident, then the local police/gendarmes must be informed.

French and UK funeral directors will normally work together and liaise with each other to ensure that all the necessary requirements are met in France and the UK.

French procedures differ significantly to those in the UK, and whilst families may wish for arrangements to be made quickly, this is not always possible.

France has created an opt out register for organ donation listing the names of people who have chosen not to donate organs or tissue after their death.

Anyone not on the register will be presumed to have consented to organ donation, although the family will still be able to object.

The coroner in the UK does not have access to the French judicial file.

However, the coroner may request a copy of the French police and post mortem results through the Consulate if he so wishes and this can delay any funeral plans.

Death Certificates will normally be issued in French but it is possible for families to ask for a multilingual translation.

It is usual for French Authorities to retain organs without consent after post mortem is completed.

Child deaths review processes abroad

UNITED STATES

There is no national process within the USA in dealing with Child deaths, be they resident or foreign individuals. Each state has their own process. Please find below a link to the state co-ordinators who will be able to assist in providing details of the police force who dealt with the death, the medical examiner and any other agencies involved.

It is known that within Colorado, the state will complete a review into the death to try and put procedures into place to try and prevent future deaths.

<https://ncfrp.org/cdr-map/>

Frequently Asked Questions

Q	Are there any resources which can be shared on how to get death certificates translated?
A	<p>In England and Wales if there is Coroners involvement (<u>LE</u> the body is brought back to a funeral Director on English soil) then the Coroner may ensure the post mortem and other information is translated for an Inquest. Good links with your coroner are necessary to enable sharing of this information with CDOP.</p> <p>CDOPs can end up being responsible for translation costs of documents where cases do not have an Inquest or if the child is not returned home, or the information required to be translated is over and above what the coroner may require for an Inquest.</p>
Q	I have been notified of the death of a child whose status is "refugee" where should I record the child's place of residence?
A	<p>NCMD advice it is reasonable to say a child is normally resident in your area if a refugee, we can reasonably expect that he/she would remain here until it was safe to return to their home. It is good practice to record that a child was fleeing the war or persecution and record the country that s/he had previously been resident with the notification form/reporting form/analysis form.</p>
Q	What about children who are normally resident in the UK who are not British nationals?
A	<p>The FCDO may also hear about the deaths of dual nationals or non-British nationals and will contact the relevant CDOP with information in these</p>

Frequently asked questions

Q	What costs may be incurred by CDOP?
A	Accessing information from other countries may mean that local CDOPs incur costs, these may include translation costs and copies of documents, which may require parental permission in order to be shared.
Q	Can CDOPs still take a case to a panel meeting if there is minimal information?
A	CDOPs can still review cases, even in instances of minimal information. These issues around access to information should be recorded on the appropriate analysis form, as well as highlighting where local CDOPs have identified areas which would make the process better or easier nationally and locally.
Q	Where do I find a list of embassy contacts for inviting staff to CDRM?
A	There is a list available on the ACDRP NHSFuture page
Q	Where can I find Country specific information when child has died abroad?
A	When someone dies abroad: advice by country - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Q	Are there any resources for highlighting the need for professionals to notify CDOPs or Child Death Review processes of a child death abroad?
A	Deaths-overseas-of-children-normally-resident-in-England-7MB-FINAL.pdf (safeguardingpartnership.org.uk) is available as a modifiable resource on the ACDRP NHSFuture page.
Q	What support do we offer other countries where their nationals who are aged under 18 die in the UK?
A	Whilst there is no statutory duty to review the deaths of children who are not normally resident in your area, CDOPs can choose to review these children's deaths.
Q	What are the processes for reviewing the deaths of service personnel aged under 18 who may die whilst posted abroad?
A	Whilst it would be rare for a service personnel under 18 to be posted abroad, if notified, CDOP would be required to review the death. This would also include children of service personnel who die whilst living in a military base abroad. CDOPs may also wish to review the deaths of children of service personnel from abroad who are living on military bases in England.

Appendix A: Foreign commonwealth and development office (FCDO)

FCDO support to non- British nationals/ dual nationals:

The foreign authority will not provide the in-country UK Embassy with information about the death of a non-British national child who has died. The FCDO CLO will instead sign-post CDOP towards the Embassy of the child's nationality. However, there is no guarantee they will support the CDOP process.

The UK Embassy can try to obtain information about the death of a dual national child, who is a UK resident, but the UK Embassy is unable to force the foreign authority to give information about the child. In cases where the child died in the country of their other nationality, the foreign authority is less likely to provide information about the child death to the FCDO.

Jurisdiction:

The FCDO/ relevant Embassy has no jurisdiction abroad. They cannot compel a foreign authorities to provide information or to provide support to an affected family.

What the relevant Embassy/ FCDO can do in child death cases^[1]:

- Provide information to bereaved families about the support available in country, and details of local repatriation providers, funeral directors and lawyers.
- Complete the FCDO Child Death form and provide this information to CDOP professionals,
- Attend CDOP meetings (subject to staff capacity).
- Liaise with the foreign authority - for example the police or social services if there are welfare concerns for the family.
- Provide the family/ CDOP professionals with country specific information (for example how long it will take for documents to be provided in the relevant country).
- In exceptional circumstances and when the family is eligible, provide Emergency Travel Documents to enable the family to return to the UK if they have lost their passports.

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(1) The FCDO can only provide support to British national children (including dual national children). Where a child is ordinarily resident in the UK, but not a British National, the FCDO can signpost CDOP towards the relevant Embassy of the child's nationality.

Appendix A: Foreign commonwealth and development office (FCDO)

What the relevant Embassy/ FCDO cannot do in child death cases:

- Provide repatriation loans/grants - this should be covered under the families travel insurance, private means or by the relevant UK local authority.
- The FCDO cannot interfere in another country's processes and must respect their systems, just as we expect them to respect the UK's laws and legal processes. Guarantee that CDOPs will be informed about a child death abroad, or that the foreign authority will provide the necessary information in the time-frame expected by CDOP professionals.
- FCDO staff abroad cannot intervene with the local laws/ practices of a country. They cannot 'save' a family or child or carry out the functions of the relevant abroad authority.
- FCDO cannot provide NHS numbers
- Translate large quantities of documentation to a professional standard

The Guidance note on when a British Child Dies Abroad can be found on the ACDRP NHSFuture page

Contacts:

The FCDO can be contacted on Coroner.LiaisonOfficer@fcdo.gov.uk , or in an emergency 0207 008 1500 (ask for Consular)

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