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Inmate Death

Revised: 9/23/99
Revised: 10/04
Revised: 01/08
Reviewed: 08/10
Revised: 3/12
Reviewed: 08/14
Revised: 3/16

INMATE DEATH

I. POLICY

- A. An inmate death, which occurs in the Mendocino County Jail, will be handled in a manner to ensure compliance with State of California mandates.

II. GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. In the case where cessation of life is not obvious, the victim will be examined at the scene by medical personnel and/or transported to the nearest medical facility where a determination will be made regarding death.
1. Should there be any doubt about death, appropriate emergency lifesaving measures will be administered and the inmate transported to the nearest medical facility for treatment.
- B. In the case where death has already been determined or death is obvious (for example: postmortem lividity, rigor mortis), the body will not be disturbed or moved from the scene until approved by, and at the direction of, the Sheriff's Office - Detectives Bureau.
- C. Corrections Division personnel will not make any public comment regarding the situation or the individual(s) involved and will refer all inquiries to the Corrections Division Commander and/or Field Services Division Commander.
- D. The Sheriff's Office - Field Services Division is responsible for the notification of next-of-kin on any inmate's death.
1. In the event the Corrections Division Commander, or designee, determines an inquiry is being made by the next-of-kin, a telephone number will be obtained or the inquirer will be requested to stand by until contact can be made of the Field Services Division for direction.

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- a. See [Policy and Procedure 1106.14 -- Next-of-Kin Notification](#).

III. PROCEDURE

A. Responsibilities Upon Discovering An Inmate's Death

1. The Corrections Division personnel will:
 - a. Isolate and preserve the scene and evidence.
 - b. Detain, identify, and separate all suspects and witnesses.
 - c. Secure instruments and/or materials used to effect death.
 - (1) Care and caution will be used if evidence must be moved to avoid destruction; and
 - (2) If death occurred in a cell or dormitory, the effected cell or dormitory will be secured.
 - d. Initiate notification via chain-of-command:
 - (1) Facility Supervisor.
 - (2) Corrections Lieutenant; and
 - (3) Corrections Division Commander.
 - (a) In the absence of the Corrections Division Commander, notification will be made to the Field Services Division - Central Operations Commander and/or designated Shift Supervisor.
2. Upon notification of an inmate's death, the Corrections Division Commander and/or if absent a Corrections Lieutenant, the Field Services - Central Operations Commander and/or Shift Supervisor will notify:
 - a. Administrative Services Division Commander.
3. Field Services Division Commander.

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- a. Detectives/Identification Bureau – it is the responsibility of the Detectives Bureau to contact any other law enforcement agency as directed by the Detective supervisor, or designee.
 - b. Sheriff-Coroner.
 - c. District Attorney.
 - d. Risk Management.
 - e. County Counsel.
- (1) Contact made prior to Review Team proceeding.
- B. Deceased Inmate's Personal Effects
1. The Corrections Division Commander and/or designee will ensure the following are completed for the Coroner/Detectives Bureau.
 - a. Secure any suicide note;
 - b. Secure any medication;
 - c. Secure all clothing and personal property; and
 - d. Make copies of documents verifying custody status and identification (commitments, remand orders, booking records, mug shots, etc.)
- C. Incident/Crime Report
1. No personnel involved in any form of an in-custody death shall write a report. A statement will be taken by the Detectives Bureau of the Sheriff's Office.
 2. The investigation for the Coroner case and/or Crime Report will be performed by the Detectives Bureau of the Sheriff's Office.
 3. The Facility Administrator, SHERIFF-CORONER, will cause a report to be written and forwarded to the Attorney General within ten (10) days of the inmate's death explaining the circumstances of the death.

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- a. The Facility Administrator, SHERIFF-CORONER, will also complete the DOJ "Inmate Information" form and forward to the Attorney General within ten (10) days.

D. Medical/Custody Review of Inmate Death

1. Refer to Cal Government Code #12525; Title 15, #1046.
2. The medical/custody review is a thorough assessment of the conditions surrounding an inmate's death. The purpose is to alert the medical delivery system to any weakness or failures on its part, which may have lead to the death or failed to prevent it and, thus, it is an additional quality control of the jail medical services.
 - a. The review will be performed after autopsy and all other reports have been received.
3. On all in custody inmate deaths, there will also be an immediate review for the purpose of determining the most likely cause of death, the circumstances surrounding it, factors which may have contributed to it and what emergency procedures might need to be implemented.
 - a. The Corrections Division Commander is responsible for assembling a review team.
4. The review team will consist of both health care and custody staff who are relevant to the incident, as well as the Corrections Division Commander, health programs manager and responsible physician.
5. All circumstances surrounding the death should be evaluated from a medical perspective. The review may also identify areas where the integration of custody and medical policies needs improvement: Was the inmate seen prior to death by medical personnel? What was the inmate's complaint? What was charged, if anything, on the medical record or in the custody log? What does the Coroner's Report indicate as to the cause of death? Were there any time delays in seeking medical or mental health assistance for the inmate? All information relative to the death gathered by medical or custody staff should be reviewed.

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