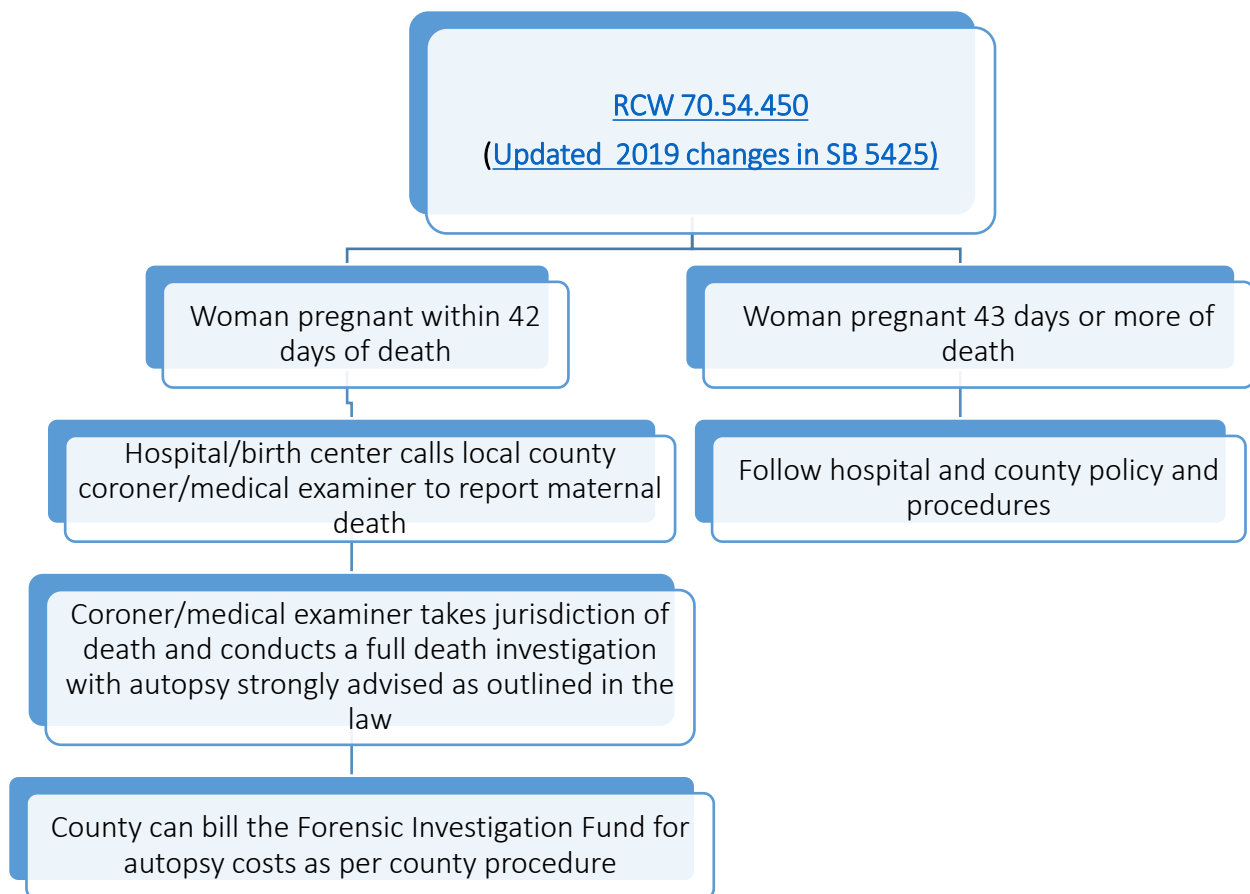


Maternal Death Reporting and Death Investigation Requirements

Washington State Department of Health

Recent legislation now requires birthing hospitals and birth centers to report the deaths of women who are pregnant, or who have been pregnant within 42 days of death to the local coroner or medical examiner's office. Once reported, local medicolegal systems are required to take jurisdiction of the death and conduct a full death investigation, with autopsy strongly recommended. Autopsies should use [guidelines for maternal death autopsy](#) published by DOH. The county may bill the state Forensic Investigation Fund for full reimbursement.

For questions or more information, contact the Maternal Mortality Review Coordinator at maternalmortalityreview@doh.wa.gov.



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Questions and Answers about the Maternal Mortality Review Law

Q: How do I report a maternal death?

The process of reporting these deaths should follow policies and procedures determined by the coroner or medical examiner's office in your jurisdiction. Birthing hospitals and birth centers are encouraged to contact local coroner or medical examiner offices for death reporting procedures in your area and to develop internal policies for your facility.

Q: What kind of maternal deaths should be reported?

Any death that occurs during pregnancy or within 42 days from the end of pregnancy should be reported to local county coroner/medical examiner jurisdiction.

Q: How will I know if a woman was pregnant or what if I don't know a woman was pregnant?

Your facility or practice should develop a screening process or policy and procedure to identify women who are pregnant, or who have recently been pregnant. This law is based on good faith efforts, if a provider or facility didn't know a woman was pregnant, there are no repercussions.

Q: Can a family decline an autopsy of a maternal death?

Yes. The Maternal Mortality Review law does not require an autopsy for medical maternal deaths, however a death investigation is required under the law.

Q: What is required by local county coroners/medical examiners after a death is reported?

A coroner or medical examiner will follow local protocol and procedure to investigate a maternal death. The coroner or medical examiner who has jurisdiction determines the need for an autopsy as part of the death investigation. The Washington State Department of Health provides [maternal death autopsy guidelines](#). The guidelines include additional recommendations for investigations of maternal deaths.

Q: What reimbursements are allowed for the death investigation and autopsy?

Costs related to investigating the deaths are not reimbursable. If an autopsy is conducted, county coroners or medical examiners can bill the Forensic Investigation Fund for autopsy costs.

Q: Can academic institutions be reimbursed for autopsy procedures?

No. Academic and medical institutions do not qualify for reimbursement of autopsies. Academic or medical institutions that conduct autopsies are encouraged to reach out to a local county coroner or medical examiner to discuss this new requirement and its implications in their community.

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