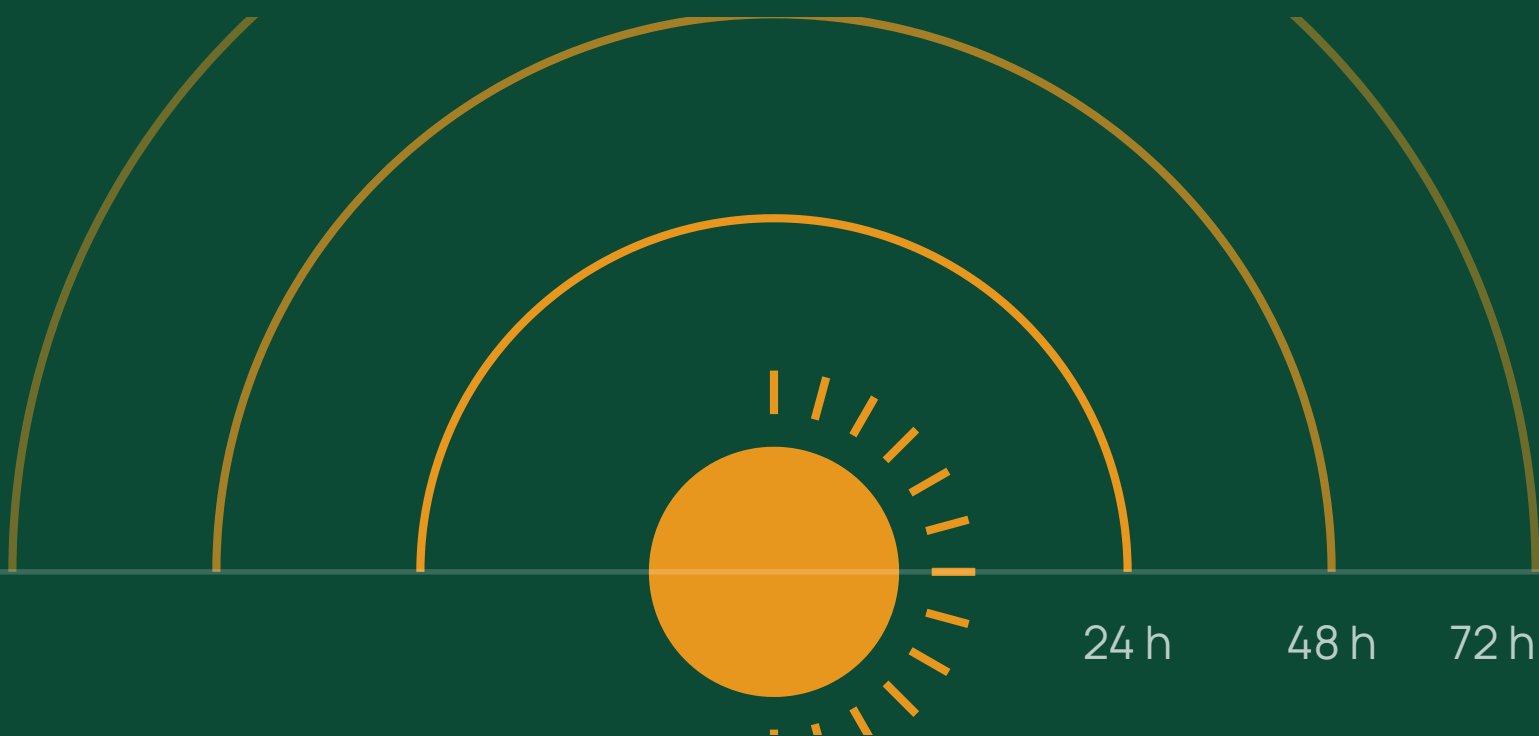


GUIDE

The first 72 hours

When a loved one dies in another country



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Last updated September 30, 2026

IN 30 SECONDS

- ✓ You don't have to solve everything today. In the first hours, it's enough to know where your loved one is, who can decide for the family and whom to call.
- ✓ The family makes the decisions. The requirements are set by the licensed providers and the local authorities.
- ✓ Before you sign or pay, ask for itemized prices in writing.
- ✓ If your loved one held another nationality, their country's consulate can guide you on the documents for the transfer.

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Before you begin

When a loved one dies far away — in another city, another state or another country — the questions arrive all at once: where are they, what has to happen, how much will it cost, how long will it take. This guide organizes the first three days into three moments: the first hours, the first day, and days two and three.

The timing is a guide, not a legal deadline. Every country, state and case has its own rules, and the people who apply them are the licensed providers and the local authorities.

- ❗ If the death has just occurred and there is an emergency, call the local emergency services first (in the United States, 911).

The first hours: where they are and who decides

1 Confirm where your loved one is

It may be a hospital, a care home, their home or the office of the medical examiner or coroner. Write down the name of the place, a contact person, a phone number and, if you're given one, a case number.

2 Ask whether the medical examiner will be involved

When a death is unexpected, violent or without recent medical care, it's common for the medical examiner or coroner to be involved. They may order an autopsy before releasing the person, and that changes the timing. Ask whether a release time is known yet.

3 Agree on who decides and who speaks for the family

Local law defines who can authorize services: often the spouse and then adult children, parents or siblings — but the order changes by jurisdiction. Even if several people decide together, it helps to have a single contact person for the providers.

4 Locate the identity documents

Passport, national ID, birth or marriage certificates. For now, it's enough to know where they are: don't send them to anyone until a provider or an authority requests them.

The first day: the main decision and the provider

One decision shapes everything else: where and how your loved one will be laid to rest. Burial or cremation? Where they died, or in their home country? You don't need to settle every detail today, but you do need the general direction, because it changes the documents, the providers and the timing.

- **Contact a licensed funeral home where the death occurred.** In most places only a funeral home or an authorized provider may collect, prepare and transfer a person who has died, and it's usually the one that files the death certificate and obtains the local permits.
- **If you're considering repatriation, say so on the first call.** Ask whether the provider has experience with international transfers and which funeral home it would work with in the destination country.
- **Ask for itemized prices in writing.** In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule gives you the right to get prices by phone, a written General Price List, and to choose only the goods and services you want ¹. Outside the United States, ask anyway.
- **Don't sign or pay until you understand what's included.** Ask what isn't included and what could lead to additional charges.
- **Talk with family in the destination country.** Who will receive your loved one, where the ceremony would be held, and which religious or cultural customs should be respected.

➤ Keeping all the information in one place saves repeated calls. Use our [checklist](#).

Days 2 and 3: documents, consulate and follow-up

1 The death certificate

It's registered by the authority where the death occurred, and the provider usually files it. In the United States, certified copies are ordered from the vital records office of the state where the death occurred ². Ask how many certified copies you should request: they're often needed for the consulate, the transfer and later paperwork.

2 The consulate

If your loved one held another nationality, their country's consulate where the death occurred is usually involved in the transfer documents. Ask which documents it requires, its office hours, and whether it offers guidance or any support program for its citizens: each consulate decides what it offers and in which cases.

3 If your loved one was a U.S. citizen who died in another country

Notify the U.S. embassy or consulate in that country. They can help you communicate with local authorities and with documents such as the Consular Report of Death of a U.S. Citizen Abroad ³. According to the State Department, decisions about the remains and their costs rest with the legal representative or the next of kin ⁴.

4 Follow-up

Ask the provider for an estimated timeline in writing and what could change it. Log every call: the date, who you spoke with and what was agreed.

What the timing depends on

There's no fixed timeline. A transfer can move quickly or stop over a single document. These are the factors that matter most:

- Whether the medical examiner is involved or there's an autopsy.
- How long the death certificate and permits take to be issued.
- Consulate and public-office hours and holidays.
- Flight availability and the airline's rules.
- The destination country's requirements.
- Whether the family has the information and authorizations ready.

Taking care of yourself these days

- Accept help: share tasks among family and friends.
- Get everything in writing and keep a copy of what you sign.
- Don't make money decisions under pressure. A reputable provider gives you time to read.
- Be wary of calls or messages from people you don't know asking for urgent payments. Pay only the provider you hired, by a method that leaves a record.
- If something isn't clear, ask again. You have the right to understand.

Who does what

The family decides

Burial or cremation, destination, ceremonies and which services to authorize.

Licensed or authorized providers perform the services

The sending funeral home, the receiving funeral home and the airline, each within its own scope. They determine their requirements.

The authorities issue the documents

They register the death and issue permits; the consulate acts within its role.

A coordinator connects the parties

A coordinator, such as Eternimax, can be your communication point: explaining what each provider requests, helping you gather it and keeping you informed. A coordinator does not perform the regulated services.

Frequently asked questions

How long does an international repatriation take?

There's no fixed timeline. It depends on where the death occurred, whether there's an autopsy, the documents, the consulate, flights and the destination country. The responsible provider can give you an estimate for your case.

Is embalming required?

It depends on the case. In the United States, the FTC notes that no state law requires routine embalming for every death¹. But for an international transfer, the destination country, the airline or the provider may require it. Ask the provider what applies.

Does the consulate pay for the transfer?

Each consulate decides whether it offers any support to its citizens and in which cases: ask it directly. When a U.S. citizen dies abroad, the State Department states that the costs rest with the legal representative or the next of kin ⁴.

Can I carry the ashes on the plane?

In the United States, TSA allows cremated remains in carry-on bags if the container can be screened by X-ray; its officers won't open the container ⁵. Also check with the airline and the destination country's rules. More in [how international repatriation works](#).

Do I need to hire a coordinator?

No. You can deal directly with the providers. A coordinator helps keep communication among all the parties organized, especially when the family is in another country or there are several providers.

Official sources

1. U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC). [The FTC Funeral Rule](#)

<https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/ftc-funeral-rule>

2. USAGov. [How to get a certified copy of a death certificate](#)

<https://www.usa.gov/death-certificate>

3. USAGov. [What to do if a U.S. citizen dies abroad](#)

<https://www.usa.gov/death-abroad>

4. U.S. Department of State · Foreign Affairs Manual. [7 FAM 250 — Disposition of Remains](#)

<https://fam.state.gov/fam/07fam/07fam0250.html>

5. U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA). [Cremated Remains](#)

<https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/items/cremated-remains>

Links to the official sources. Requirements change: always check the current version.

General information

This guide is general information. It is not legal, medical, immigration or tax advice and does not replace a professional licensed in your jurisdiction. Requirements, timelines and costs are determined by the providers and authorities in each case and may change. Eternimax coordinates between the parties and does not itself perform funeral or other regulated services.

Written by

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Last updated

September 30, 2026

Next update

March 31, 2027



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