

# NSW Perinatal Postmortem Service

Preparation of baby and placenta for postmortem

(February 2026)

## Purpose

This document outlines the procedure for the preparation of babies and placentas being transferred for a postmortem examination.

## Key principles

- Babies for postmortem examination must have three (3) forms of identification
  1. Arm/leg bands or mortuary tag attached to the body
  2. Mortuary label on exterior of blue under-sheet
  3. Mortuary label on exterior of body bag
- **Do not freeze** babies and placentas. They should be stored refrigerated not frozen
- **Do not** place babies or placentas in formalin or saline solutions
- Always ensure that babies who require ice packs have adequate protection between the ice and the baby
- Placentas and non-registered babies for postmortem examination can be transported by courier services (on ice if transportation time exceeds one hour)
- Registered babies or deceased neonates must be transported with a mortuary transportation service (refrigerated transport)
- Make a referral at <https://pathology.health.nsw.gov.au/services/perinatal-postmortem/>

For all questions email: [NSWPATH-PerinatalPostMortemService@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:NSWPATH-PerinatalPostMortemService@health.nsw.gov.au)

- Contact the Perinatal Post-mortem Coordinator on 0436698366

Perinatal Post-mortem Facilitator on 0476276283

## Days following birth

- To maximise the benefits of a postmortem examination, babies and placentas should be transported to the NSW Perinatal Postmortem Service as soon as possible following birth.
- Families consenting to a postmortem should be advised that delaying the examination can affect the examination quality, especially for small babies or where the baby died prior to birth.
- Ideally babies should be sent within 24 hours. However, delaying transfer to support the bereavement process will be an individual decision.
- Families can nurse and cuddle baby for short periods of time should they wish. Babies for postmortem must be kept in a cold cot or mortuary when not being held by family.



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- Babies for postmortem should only be kept in a cold cot for up to 24 hours to maximise the benefit of the examination. Following this, keep baby in the mortuary.



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## Procedure for preparing baby and placenta for postmortem

### Following birth

- Please email all requests to

[NSWPATH-PerinatalPostMortemService@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:NSWPATH-PerinatalPostMortemService@health.nsw.gov.au)

They will be responded to the next business day.

- Discuss family's wishes regarding specific cultural or religious practices. Notify Care Coordinator of the family's wishes in relation to scheduling the postmortem, funeral or specific requests
- Offer the parents the opportunity to participate in the care of the baby and complete the memory making processes
- Attach identification bands as appropriate for gestation (Appendix A)
- It is generally advised that a stillborn baby not be bathed prior to the post-mortem examination. Remove obvious soiling with gauze and water. However, if the family request bathing it should not be withheld. Document the bath in the referral form.
- This recommendation is specific to the situation. If feticide has been performed, bathing the baby after birth is generally not a concern.
- As packaging involves removing the baby's clothes and placing the baby in various transportation receptacles, final preparation of baby might be best conducted away from parents. Hospital staff will need to assess the best approach.

### Placenta

- Examine placenta as per local protocol:
  - Place in a sealable plastic bag with maternal addressograph on the outside of the bag, place placenta in a pathology bucket
  - Attach a maternal addressograph label and appropriate transport sticker to the bucket
  - Store refrigerated (not frozen) while awaiting transport (Appendix C).
- If the mother requires operative delivery of the placenta:
  - Ensure the placenta is either returned for preparation in the Birth Unit, or appropriately packaged in the operating suite
  - Send placenta to the NSW Perinatal Postmortem Service for examination.
- Place ice packs in bucket if the placenta is being transported by non-refrigerated transport and the transport time exceeds one hour.



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## Preparing for transport

- Remove valuables and clothes from baby. Place the clothes baby is to be dressed in after the examination in a sealed/labeled plastic bag with baby or maternal addressograph label on exterior of bag (Appendix D)
- Ensure baby has identification tags attached (Appendix A)
- Wrap baby in blue under-sheet, plastic side to skin.
- Place mortuary identification label on exterior of blue under-sheet
- Place baby in a body bag and place mortuary identification label on exterior of body bag
- Place body bag in a polystyrene box and attach transportation label to exterior of the body bag/bucket/box (Appendix B)
- Notify Pathology via the Care Coordinator of any maternal infectious diseases
- Include with baby all documentation required for the perinatal pathologist, as well as baby clothes
- If family has returned home, refrigerate baby as per local protocol until transported
- Place ice packs around the body bag in the box to keep the baby cold if the baby is being transported by non-refrigerated transport and the transport time exceeds one hour.



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## Appendix A: Baby identification



- Attach identification bands to leg and arm
- For smaller or more delicate babies, ID can be placed around the abdomen

Note: Funeral Directors can refuse to accept a baby who is not properly identified.

- If armbands were retained by family, attach completed mortuary identification tag or another set of armbands to arm and leg with a soft tie

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## Appendix B: Baby packaging



- Wrap baby in bluey-sheet.

Note: Use several bluey-sheets if baby is larger in size or there are fluids present.

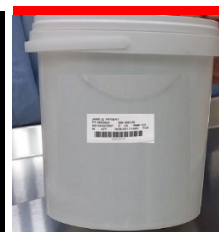
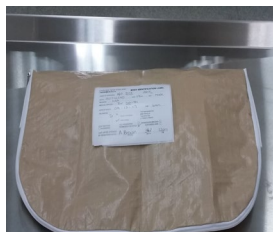
Clinicians should place the baby plastic side to skin

Place very small delicate babies undressed, with labelling around the waist, in a blue under-sheet (as below). Label the outside of the sheet and place in a small body bag.

- Attach a mortuary identification label to the front of the package.



- Place baby package in small body bag, then in a polystyrene box
- Label body bag with mortuary identification sticker
- Store baby refrigerated **not frozen** until transport arrives.



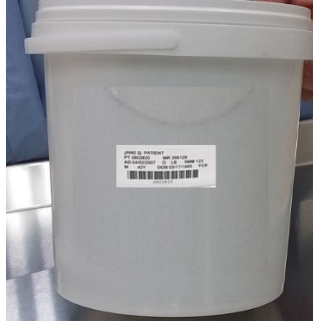
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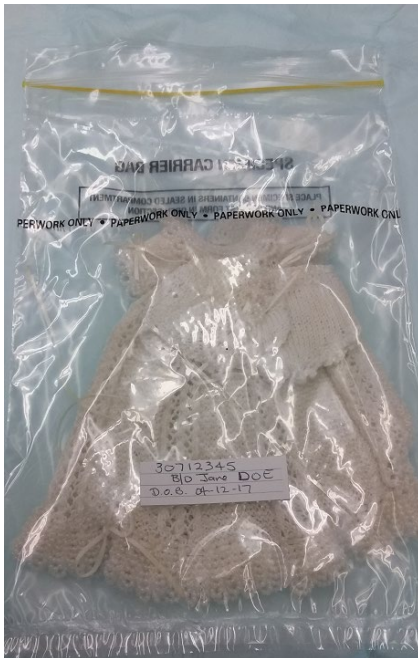
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## Appendix C: Placenta packaging

- Wrap placenta in a plastic bag with maternal addressograph label on outside of plastic bag
- Place placenta in bucket and securely fasten lid
- Attach maternal addressograph label and transport label to the exterior of the bucket
- Store placenta refrigerated **not frozen** until transport arrives
- Ice packs must be placed in bucket to keep placenta cool if non-refrigerated transport time exceeds one hour.



## Appendix D: Baby personal items



Babies are to be sent for postmortem examination undressed.

- Place items requested by the parents in a labelled plastic specimen bag and include in baby package

This can include specific clothes the parents would like the baby dressed in following reconstruction or a personal item to be placed with the baby

- In addition, please include an appropriately sized nappy.