

## Non-suspicious sudden Death- Q&As

### What is a non-suspicious sudden death?

This is a death where the cause is known and there are no suspicious circumstances.

### What is an unexplained sudden death?

This is a death where the cause of death is not known. In these circumstances a medical practitioner will not be able to issue a Cause of Death certificate at the time.

Further investigation will be required at the scene and at a mortuary to discover the full circumstances of the death. The death may subsequently be determined as suspicious or non-suspicious.

### How should suicide be treated?

The cause of death is something for the medical profession and ultimately HM Coroner to determine. Officers must avoid using the word suicide; this can be difficult for family and friends to accept at a traumatic time and could also cause a rift between the family and the police.

Police must avoid using the word suicide when talking to the media, unless these are the findings of a coroner's court. Police should therefore refer to the death as an 'unexplained death' or a 'death where the cause is undetermined', until the cause is fully known.

This does not prevent officers from providing facts surrounding the death if so asked by the family.

In cases where it appears that the subject has taken their own life, the duty officer must also ensure that the scene has been adequately forensically examined and that a photographer has been requested to record the body position and the scene.

These may well be [critical incidents](#).

### What is the role of the Police?

We act on behalf of the Coroner, the coroner delegates certain powers to the police. We investigate suspicious deaths on behalf of the coroner to bring the perpetrator to justice. In cases where police are in attendance at a sudden death, police should inform the Coroner to check whether their involvement is required.

Borough commanders **must** ensure a written protocol with the local authority and the coroner exists that clearly lays down the respective responsibilities of each agency in tracing and informing a relative or responsible person, such as a solicitor or an executor. This protocol should be published under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and be available on the respective boroughs' intranet site for reference purposes and reviewed annually.