



**National Law  
Enforcement  
Museum**

at the **Motorola Solutions**  
Foundation Building

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# Forensic Pathology

# What Is Forensic Pathology?

- The field that focuses on determining the cause of death by examining a corpse
- **Forensic Pathologist/ Medical examiner:** person trained in medicine that investigates deaths and injuries
- **Post Mortem/Autopsy:** surgical procedure that consists of a thorough examination of a corpse by dissection



# Activity #1: True or False

1. Medical examiners can pinpoint the exact time of death
2. The body cools down after death
3. After death, the body becomes limp and wobbly
4. To take an accurate body temperature of a corpse, a thermometer is inserted into the liver
5. Medical examiners perform autopsies on all dead bodies

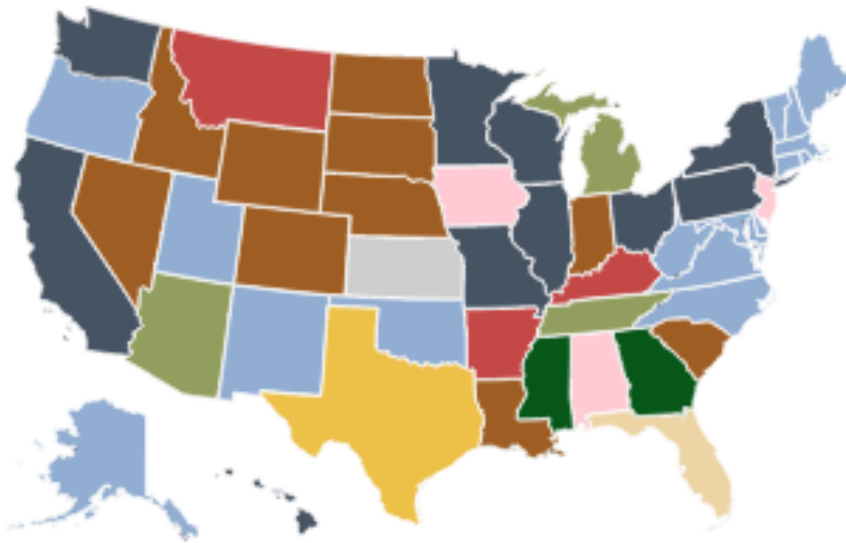
# Activity #1: Answers

1. **FALSE:** Depending on the condition of the body, medical examiners may be able to give a window of death of a few hours
2. **TRUE**
3. **BOTH:** After death the body become stiff and rigid for about 24-48 hours and then limp again
4. **TRUE**
5. **FALSE:** Medical examiners usually perform autopsies after suspicious death

# Medical Examiner vs. Coroner

## A National Patchwork

Coroner and medical examiner systems vary widely from state to state and even county to county. Hover over each state to see what forensics systems are in place there.



- Some county coroners and some county medical examiners
- Some county justices of the peace and some county medical examiners
- County coroners
- State medical examiner
- State medical examiner and some county medical examiners
- County medical examiners
- State medical examiner and county coroners
- State medical examiner, some county medical examiners and some county coroners
- District medical examiners
- District coroners

# What Type of Deaths does the ME Examine?

## -Unnatural Deaths

- Accidental

- Suicide

- Homicide

- Suspicious

- Sudden and Unexpected

- Unattended or unwitnessed, and the deceased was not attended by a physician at any time in the 30-day period prior to death

- Deaths in Custody

# Manner, Cause, and Mechanism of Death

## Manner

The type of death

- Natural
- Accident
- Suicide
- Homicide
- Undetermined

## Cause

The disease or injury that produces the physiological disruption in the body resulting in death

Ex. A gunshot wound

## Mechanism

The specific change in the body that brought about the end of life

Ex. Blood loss due to the gunshot

**Game!**

# Homicide



**Game!**

# Electrocution

**Game!**

# Asphyxiation

**Game!**

# Cardiac arrest

**Game!**

# Blunt Force Trauma

**Game!**

# Drowning

**Game!**

**Cerebral anoxia**  
**(not enough oxygen in brain)**

# Final Question:

**A jogger falls into a lake and drowns.**

**Manner: ?**

**Cause: ?**

**Mechanism: ?**

# Examination

- 3 groups of students
- Rotate from station to station
- 5 minutes per station
- **Causes of death\***
  - broken back,
  - gunshot,
  - or stabbing



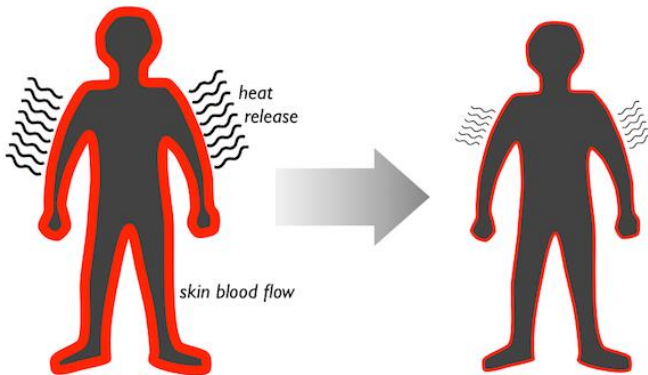
\* These pigs died of natural causes. The injuries were added after their deaths for the purposes of this activity.



# Time of Death

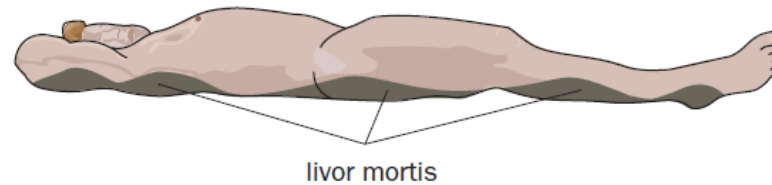
## Algor Mortis

- “Death Heat”



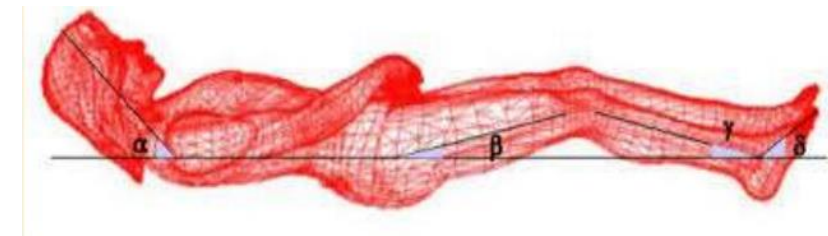
## Livor Mortis

- “Death Color”



## Rigor Mortis

- “Death Stiffness”



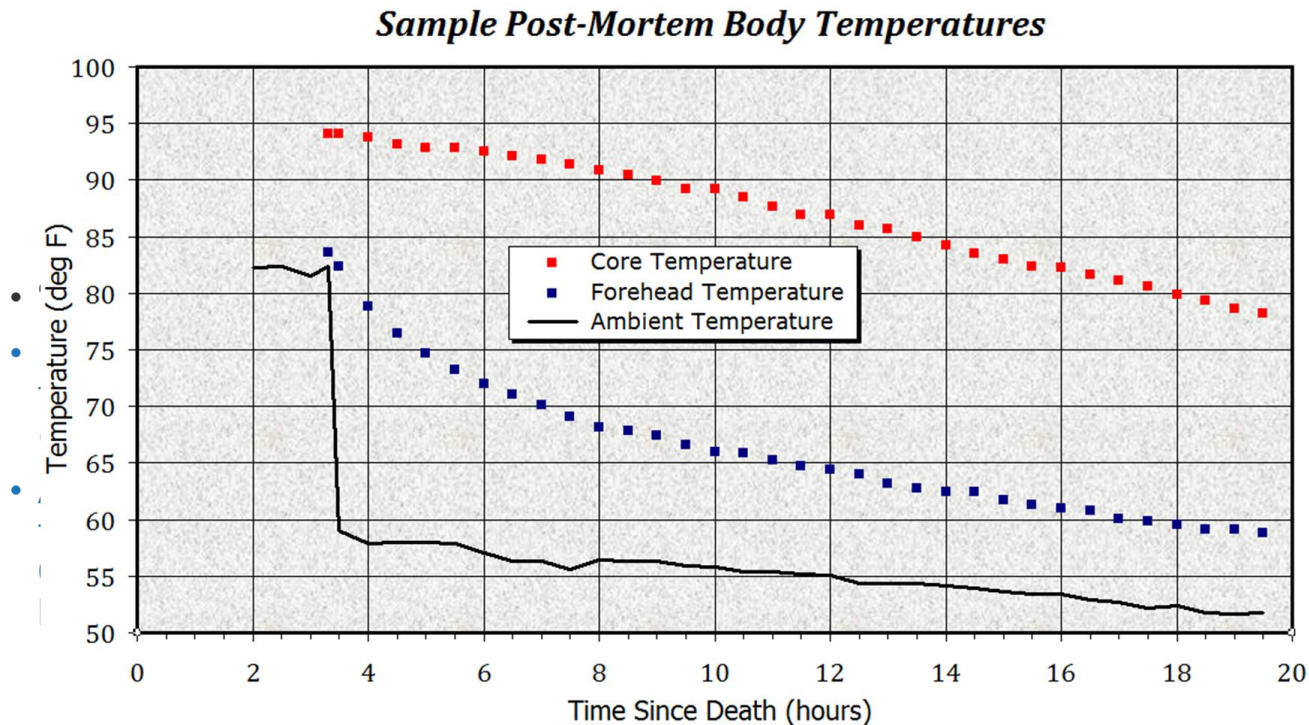
# Algor Mortis

- For the first 12 hours, the body loses 1.4°F per hour.

- After the first 12 hours, the body loses about 0.7°F per hour.

- Things that can affect heat loss:

- If the body is clothed
- Temperature of the environment
- Health
- Body weight



# How Does an Autopsy Work?





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