

There are exceptions to every rule. In general, however, the following rules hold true in the United States: Every death investigation jurisdiction is run under the jurisdiction of either a coroner or medical examiner; coroners are usually elected lay individuals who serve a county for a specified term while medical examiners are usually physicians (usually pathologists or forensic pathologists) who are appointed for unspecified terms and who serve a county, group of counties, or a state.

Two articles summarize the location and characteristics of coroner and medical examiner systems in the United States. The articles may be found in most medical libraries. The articles are:

Hanzlick R. Coroner training needs: a numeric and geographic analysis. *JAMA* 1996;276:1775-1778. (December 4, 1996)

Hanzlick R, Combs D. Medical examiner and coroner systems: history and trends. *JAMA* 1998;279:870-874. (March 18, 1998)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published a manual titled Death Investigation in the United States and Canada which describes the laws and death investigation systems for each state, province, and territory and also includes a directory of contact points for the more than 2000 death investigation jurisdictions in the US and Canada.

The portion of the CDC Directory that contains descriptions of death investigation system type by state may be found by going to <http://www.cdc.gov/epo/dphsi/mecisp/index.htm>

The National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) is an organization consisting mainly of physician medical examiners and their investigative and administrative affiliates, or physician pathologists who work within medical examiner or coroner death investigation systems. Some physician coroners are also members.

The International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME) is an organization consisting mainly of elected lay and physician coroners, with a smaller constituency of physician medical examiners. The IACME office of Secretary is located in Macon, Georgia.

Links to specific coroner or medical examiner offices with web sites may be found on the New Mexico Office of Medical Investigator site at [New Mexico Office of Medical Investigator, UNM School of Medicine](#)