



How would I bring my baby home?

Information and resources for bereaved parents about the option to bring your stillborn or deceased baby home.

Bringing your stillborn/deceased baby home may seem foreign or strange to you at first and may seem difficult. In this section we're going to explain how this routinely happens in New Zealand – not because this is the only way to do it but because it is the way hundreds of bereaved parents say goodbye to their babies here, every year. Bringing your stillborn/deceased baby home is a perfectly natural thing to do.

If a baby has died in hospital or has died during pregnancy and was delivered in hospital, the midwives will ask the parents if they wish to bring their baby home. Bereaved parents may be advised to contact a funeral director who can transport their baby for them or families may prefer to do this for themselves. Engaging a funeral director is often optional – you may wish to confirm the legal aspects of this in your country.

A stillborn/deceased baby would normally be transported in a Moses basket or something similar. Many Sands groups around New Zealand provide baskets for babies at different gestations, and bereaved parents are encouraged to secure their baby in whatever vessel they have chosen to transport him/her in.

In New Zealand, babies are not routinely embalmed unless instructed by the family. Parents are advised to keep them cool. A funeral director often provides information to parents on how they look after their baby whilst at home, helping to slow the decomposition. Keeping a deceased baby cool is usually achieved by putting watertight bagged ice or chilled ice packs under the mattress in the Moses basket. Of course it is natural for a dead body to start decomposing and this is usually noticeable by smell, but a baby who has died in utero has no bacteria in its body, and a newborn has very little, so the process doesn't happen as fast as it would for an adult body. A way of addressing any smell is to use baby talc on your baby's clothing or drops of essential oil.

It is natural to want to hold and dress your baby. If the thought of cuddling your cold baby is upsetting for you, it is often recommended to use a snuggly blanket and microwave it for 10–20 seconds so it is slightly warm (of course checking that the blanket is safe for microwaving and has no metal buttons or bobbles on it). The warmth of the blanket is not enough to affect your baby's temperature and therefore the state of his/her body. And it feels just a little bit nicer to hold a baby with warmth rather than cool to the touch.

If your baby has had a post-mortem you may feel nervous to touch or hold them. While you do need to be gentle, it is still fine to pick up your baby. He/she will probably have a surgical skin bandage over his/her chest where an incision was made and may be wearing a bonnet or hat to cover the incision that has been made at the back of his/her head.

In New Zealand families have their baby at home on average from one to five days prior to the funeral service or burial/cremation. It is normal for a deceased adult to seep some body fluids and this may happen with a deceased baby as well. If the baby was stillborn then he/she is unlikely to have a lot of

fluid come out of their body, but it is natural for there to be some seepage. It helps to have some absorbent material underneath the baby, between the baby and the blanket. It is possible that a small amount of blood may seep from baby's nostrils. Gently insert a small piece of cottonwool which has been coated in petroleum jelly into each nostril (this does not need to be visible).

While this may seem upsetting to think about, some parents have commented on the importance of seeing their baby in a deceased state and knowing that he/she is going through a completely natural process.

You can bath your baby whilst at home. Very salty water is recommended as it is a natural preservative. All you need to do when bathing a deceased baby is gently sponge them or dab them with water. It is important not to rub their skin as it is likely to be fragile. Pat him/her dry with a soft towel.

Bathing your baby is an opportunity for you to see their intricate, beautiful little body up close. Many bereaved parents have regretted not seeing their baby naked and this is an opportunity to do so.

You may choose to have your baby in a communal room whilst at home, or in a separate bedroom or room in your house. Some family and friends may be unaware and unprepared to discover your stillborn or deceased baby is at home. Additionally, you may have told your family and friends that baby is at home but they feel uncomfortable having baby in the same room as everyone else. Each family interacts and responds in a different way. These interactions are always individual to families and you are the best person to work out how to navigate them.

It is very common for a bereaved mother to feel great surges of maternal pride and want everyone to meet her beautiful baby, despite the fact that the baby is deceased. This may relate to hormones but we're also aware that whilst we see our deceased babies through eyes of love, others may not see the same beauty straight away. Again, you will know the people in your circle who are not comfortable with this practice who may benefit from some extra information.

Having your baby at home usually precedes a form of saying goodbye, whether it is a formal funeral or a private service. You may wish to transport your baby from your home to the funeral or service and this can usually be discussed with a funeral director if you are using one.

Information about transporting your baby is available through Sands, NZ: <http://www.sands.org.nz/files/Pamphlet%20-%20Transporting%20Your%20Baby.pdf>



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For more answers to your questions about bringing stillborn and deceased babies home, go to <http://whenyourbabydies.com/q/>