

How to organise a funeral in Poland



When someone you love dies, the job of handling all personal and legal details may be difficult. The aim of this guide is to help you organise a funeral in Poland. The guide will walk you through the whole process, from reporting and registering the death to installing a tombstone.

Table of Contents

Steps of the process	7
1. First steps required by law	7
2. Arranging the burial with the cemetery manager	7
3. Arranging the ceremony with the funeral home	8
4. Applying for the funeral grant	8
5. After the funeral	8
Necessary documents	9
Who can organise a burial	10
Closest family members	10
Reporting the death	11
Death at home	12
Unexpected death at home	13
Death at a hospital or nursing home	13
Death in a public place	13
Death in an accident or as a result of a crime	14
Death abroad	14
Death of an infectious disease	15
Death of Covid-19	15
Choosing a funeral home	17
What to consider when choosing a funeral home	17
Services of a funeral home	17
Legal formalities and contacting the cemetery manager	18
Before the funeral ceremony	18
The funeral ceremony	19
Tidying the tomb after the funeral	19
Transport of the body	20

Storage of the body	21
Registering the death	22
Where to register	23
Who can register the death	23
Required documents	24
Cremation	25
Cost of cremation	25
Burial of the ashes	25
Arranging the burial with the cemetery manager	26
Cemetery plot fee	26
Cost of digging a grave	26
Arranging the ceremony with the funeral home	28
Choosing a coffin or urn	28
Choosing a coffin	28
Choosing an urn	28
Funeral cross with a plate	29
Preparing the body	29
Dressing the body	29
Putting on make-up	29
Embalming	29
Clothing for the deceased person	29
If the body can't be dressed	31
Printing and publishing death notices	31
If you don't know the burial date yet	31
Preparing a farewell elegy	32
Printing memorial cards	32
Music	33
Flower arrangements	34

Types of flower arrangements	34
Types of flowers	34
Colours of flowers	34
Funeral sash (ribbon)	34
Organising a rosary prayer	36
Organising a post-funeral get together	37
Religious and secular burials	38
Funeral officiant fee	38
Religious burial	38
Secular burial	38
Funeral customs in Poland	39
How to behave when someone dies	39
Informing about the death	39
Obituary (nekrolog / klepsydra)	39
Informing family and friends	40
If you don't know the burial date yet	40
Rosary prayers before the funeral	40
Condolences	41
Expressing condolences	41
Condolence card	41
How to dress for a funeral	41
What to bring to a funeral	42
Flowers	42
Instead of flowers	42
After the funeral	43
Tidy the tomb	43
Choose a tombstone	43
Arrange grave care services	44

Total cost of the burial	45
Funeral grant	46
What is the amount of the funeral grant	46
Conditions for receiving the funeral grant	46
Who is entitled to the funeral grant	47
Where to apply	48
When to apply	48
How to apply	49
What documents are required	49
VAT invoice	49
Legal foundation	50
New 2022 Cemeteries and Burials Act	50
Cemeteries and Burials Act of 31 January 1959	51
Vital Records Act of 28 November 2014	51
Exhumation	53
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)	54
Bibliography	57
Glossary	59

Steps of the process

1. First steps required by law

- Report the death and get the **death card**¹ (*karta zgonu*) from the doctor who pronounces the death.
- Call a funeral home to pick up the body and transport it to the mortuary.
- If someone dies at a hospital, steps 1 and 2 are done by the hospital staff.
- The funeral home can take care of some the remaining steps .
- Register the death in the Civil Registry Office and get the **death certificate**² (*akt zgonu*).

2. Arranging the burial with the cemetery manager

- Buy a cemetery plot, if you don't have one, or renew the plot fee.
- Arrange the funeral service and burial date.
- Pay the grave digging fee.

¹(Polish: karta zgonu) a document issued by the doctor who pronounces the death in order to confirm the fact that someone died as well as the time and cause of death. It is necessary to register the death in the Civil Registry Office. The cause of death indicated in the death card can be important in case you want to receive life insurance benefits.

²(Polish: akt zgonu) is an official document entered into the Civil Registry. You need the death certificate to organise the funeral and apply for the funeral grant.

3. Arranging the ceremony with the funeral home

- Make all funeral arrangements with the funeral home. The company can deliver a [wide range of services](#), including providing burial or cremation clothes, flowers, and live or pre-recorded music.
- Optional: Organise a rosary prayer before the funeral. If you want to learn more about the Polish tradition of rosary prayers for the dead, go to the Funeral customs in Poland section.
- Optional: Organise a post-funeral get-together (*stypa*).

4. Applying for the funeral grant

- This can be done within 12 months after the death.
- You need a VAT invoice from the funeral home to confirm your expenses.
- You can authorise the funeral home to apply for the grant on your behalf. It is possible for the funeral home to “credit” the funeral cost up to the amount of the funeral grant, so that you only have to pay any costs over PLN 4000,00.

5. After the funeral

- Tidy the tomb. This can be done by the funeral home.
- Choose a tombstone. A tombstone is usually installed 6 months after the burial.
- Optional: Arrange grave care services.

Necessary documents

- **Death card** (*karta zgonu*)

It is issued by a doctor. It is necessary to transport the body, register the death and arrange the burial.

Note: Make a xerox copy of the death card. It is the only document that indicates the cause of death. You may need this information later, for example in order to receive life insurance benefits.

- **Identity card** (*dowód osobisty*) of the deceased person

- **Identity card** or passport of the person who arranges the funeral

- **Death certificate** (*akt zgonu*)

You need it to apply for the funeral grant.

You need it in case of inheritance proceedings.

You need it to apply for the survivor's pension and other social benefits.

- **Proof of insurance of the deceased person**

You need it to apply for the funeral grant.

- **Proof of your own social insurance**

In case the deceased person was not entitled to the funeral grant.

Who can organise a burial

A burial can be arranged by:

- the [closest family members](#) of the deceased
- any person who declares the will to do it
- competent military authorities (if the deceased was in active military service)
- state authorities, institutions and social organisations (if the deceased was a distinguished citizen)

(Article 10 of the Cemeteries and Burials Act)

Closest family members

The closest family members of the person who died are their:

- wife or husband (the remaining spouse)
- children, grandchildren (descendants)
- parents, grandparents (ascendants)
- sister/brother, niece/nephew, aunt/uncle, cousin (lateral relatives up to the 4th degree)
- mother-in-law/father-in-law (relatives by affinity up to the 1st degree)

Reporting the death

Death in Poland has to be pronounced by a doctor who saw the patient during their last illness. If the doctor is not available, this can be done by a different doctor or a coroner.

The doctor who pronounces the death issues a **death card**¹ (*karta zgonu*). The death card is the only document that allows you to start the burial proceedings.

The death card contains detailed information about:

- the deceased person (personal data, education, address)
- the place, date and time of death
- the cause of death
- an autopsy or other post-mortem examinations

Only the [closest family members](#), who have the right to organise the burial, can get the death card.

Note: Make a xerox copy of the death card. It is the only document that indicates the cause of death. You may need this information later, for example in order to receive life insurance benefits.

¹(Polish: karta zgonu) a document issued by the doctor who pronounces the death in order to confirm the fact that someone died as well as the time and cause of death. It is necessary to register the death in the Civil Registry Office. The cause of death indicated in the death card can be important in case you want to receive life insurance benefits.

Unexpected death at home

If someone dies at home unexpectedly, the doctor may decide not to issue a death card and instead call the police. A post-mortem examination may be necessary to find out the cause of a sudden death.

Death at a hospital or nursing home

If the death occurs **at a hospital, nursing home or hospice**, the doctor who was taking care of the patient issues the **death card**¹. In the hospital, the body is then taken to the hospital morgue. If someone dies in a nursing home or a hospice, the body is transported by the funeral home.

The hospital, nursing home or hospice employees are not allowed to contact a funeral home or give them the family contact data. You are free to [choose a funeral home](#) on your own.

Death in a public place

If the death occurs in a public place, you have to call:

- An ambulance - call 112 from a cell phone or 999 from a landline
- The emergency physician will pronounce the death
- The police - call 112 from a cell phone or 997 from a landline
- Police officers will exclude third party involvement in the death
- The funeral home that you choose

A funeral car (**hearse**²) will transport the body to the morgue

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²also called a funeral car, a special vehicle designed to transport the body of a deceased person in a coffin or transport capsule

Death in an accident or as a result of a crime

If the death is a result of an accident, a crime or suicide, the doctor who pronounces the death has to **inform the police or the prosecutor's office**. If a post-mortem examination (autopsy) is necessary, the body is taken to a dissection room. In this case, the death card is issued by a pathologist.

If there is an autopsy, the funeral is usually delayed until the prosecutor officially decides that the body can be transported back and buried. You need the death card and an **approval from the prosecutor's office** in order to register the death in the Civil Registry Office.

Death abroad

When someone dies outside of Poland, the burial procedure is more complicated, time-consuming and more expensive than a normal funeral. **The easiest way** of dealing with the formalities for bringing the body to Poland, transporting the remains and registering the death **is by authorising a specialised funeral home** to handle the process.

To **bring the body** from abroad, you have to:

- apply to the Starosta at the Poviast Starosty for permission to transport the body
- get a certified translation of the foreign death certificate
- apply for a death certificate in your Civil Office Registry
- pay for a special coffin used in international transport
- rent a special funeral car to transport the coffin
- get the consul's approval for transporting a body
- optional: pay for a special, metal coffin used in air transportation

Bringing an urn with ashes is easier and cheaper. You can even transport the ashes in your hand luggage on the plane if you put them in a special, unbreakable container.

Death of an infectious disease

Note: Covid-19 is not considered an infectious disease in the context of the obligation of immediate burial.

According to the Act on Burials and Cemeteries, the body **has to be buried within 24 hours**, on the nearest cemetery, if the death is a result of one of the infectious diseases listed below:

- cholera
- typhoid fever and other rickettsial infections
- plague
- relapsing fever
- polio
- glanders
- leprosy
- anthrax
- rabies
- yellow fever and other viral hemorrhagic fevers

Death of Covid-19

Covid-19 **is not listed** as an infectious disease that requires registering the death and burying the body within 24 hours. However, since April 2020, there are special safety precautions that must be taken when someone dies of Covid-19:

- the body must be disinfected
- the body should not be washed (if it is necessary, special precautions must be taken)
- the body should not be changed into different clothes
- the body should not be shown to anyone

Chapter 2

- **the body must be put in a special bag**, together with clothes or hospital gown
- in case of cremation the bag must be placed in a second bag
- the outside of the bags must be disinfected
- in case of earth burial, a 5-cm layer of absorbant material must be placed in the coffin
- after placing the body in the coffin or transport capsule used before cremation, the outside of the coffin or transport capsule must be disinfected

(Regulation of the Minister of Health of 3 April 2020 changing the regulation on dealing with human body and remains (Journal of Laws - Dz. U. of 2020, item 585).

Choosing a funeral home

As the person who organises the funeral, you are free to choose any funeral home (*zakład pogrzebowy*) you want. Remember, that **medical employees are not allowed to recommend a funeral home** or give you any contact information. Even if there is one company they usually work with for any reason, for example because it's located right next to the hospital, you are not obliged to accept the company's offer.

What to consider when choosing a funeral home

- Location - Choose a company that is close to where you live, the church where the funeral service will be held or the cemetery.
- Does the funeral home have own mortuary chambers - This is especially important, if a hospital mortuary is far away from the place where the funeral service will be held.
- Cost of the services - Funeral homes run their business in a free market and compete with each other. The prices of the same services offered by companies can be very different even in a small town.
- What services are provided - Can you authorise a funeral home employee to apply for the death certificate and funeral grant? Can they arrange the religious ceremony and burial date?
- Does the funeral home offer preparing the body for the funeral? Do they sell funeral clothing for the deceased?

Services of a funeral home

Modern funeral homes offer a wide range of services necessary for the funeral ceremony and burial. As soon as you **receive the death card**, the employees of a funeral home can help you at each step of the process. You can **authorise** them, by signing proxy forms, to represent you in all matters related to organising the funeral.

Legal formalities and contacting the cemetery manager

- Transport the body to mortuary (hospital or own) - the act of transferring the body is called *eksportacja*.
- Register the death at the Civil Registry Office and receive the death certificate.
- Apply for the funeral grant that will be transferred to the account of the funeral home to cover the expenses up to the grant sum (that is PLN 4,000.00).
- Arrange the funeral service and burial date.
- Arrange [cremation](#), including transport of the body and the ashes.

Before the funeral ceremony

- Choose a coffin or cremation coffin and urn.
- Choose funeral clothes for the deceased person.
- Prepare (wash, shave, put on make-up) and dress the body.
- Print death notices and publish a death notice online (e.g. on company website or Facebook profile).
- Choose flower arrangements.
- Arrange music for the funeral ceremony.
- Prepare or help prepare a farewell elegy.
- Print memorial cards.
- Arrange music for the ceremony.
- Organise a rosary prayer - if you didn't arrange it with the parish.
- Help organise a post-funeral get together (*stypa*).

The funeral ceremony

Bring the coffin to the chapel or funeral home goodbye room.

Transport the coffin to the church.

Transport the coffin to the cemetery.

Set out a funeral tent.

Carry the coffin from the funeral car to the grave.

Optional: Read the farewell elegy.

Put the coffin or urn in the ground.

Tidying the tomb after the funeral

Put a temporary cross and temporary frame on the tomb.

Provide grave care services.

Transport of the body

After the doctor pronounces death, the body of the deceased person is transported to a **morgue**¹. The act of taking the body out of the house or apartment to the morgue is called *eksportacja*. The body must be transported in a special funeral car (**hearse**²) provided by a funeral home. This service is usually **available 24/7**.

Note: You are not allowed to transport the body in your own vehicle.

The doctor, paramedic and other hospital employees **are not allowed to recommend a funeral home**. You are free to [choose any funeral home](#) you want. Funeral homes are usually located near the hospital or the cemetery. You can also find contact information online.

¹or mortuary, a cold place used for storage of human bodies before the burial or autopsy

²also called a funeral car, a special vehicle designed to transport the body of a deceased person in a coffin or transport capsule

Storage of the body

The body is transported to a **morgue**¹, where it awaits a respectful burial. Apart from the hospital mortuaries, more and more funeral homes offer their own mortuary chambers.

You must pay a **daily fee** for storing the body, both at the hospital and the funeral home.

¹or mortuary, a cold place used for storage of human bodies before the burial or autopsy

Registering the death

Before the burial, you must register the death in the Civil Registry Office (*Urząd Stanu Cywilnego*).

You have to do this:

- **within 3 days** after receiving the death card
- within 24 hours of the death, if the death was a result of [some infectious diseases](#)

The Registrar of the Civil Registry Office issues a **death certificate**¹ on the day of registration.

When you register the death, the deceased person's identity card is invalidated and the person is automatically de-registered from the address of residence.

You get one free abridged copy of the death certificate.

¹(Polish: akt zgonu) is an official document entered into the Civil Registry. You need the death certificate to organise the funeral and apply for the funeral grant.

Rzeczpospolita Polska
Województwo
Urząd Stanu Cywilnego

USC/OS/3
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Odpis skrócony aktu zgonu

- Dane osoby zmarłej**
 - Imię pierwsze
 - Imię drugie
 - Imiona kolejne
 - Nazwisko
 - Nazwisko rodowe
 - Stan cywilny
 - Data urodzenia
 - Miejsce urodzenia
- Czas i miejsce zgonu / znalezienia zwłok**
 - Data zgonu
 - Godzina zgonu
 - Miejsce zgonu
 - Data znalezienia zwłok
 - Godzina znalezienia zwłok
 - Miejsce znalezienia zwłok
- Dane małżonka osoby zmarłej**
 - Imię (imiona)
 - Nazwisko
 - Nazwisko rodowe
- Dane rodziców osoby zmarłej**

	Ojciec	Matka
Imię (imiona)		
Nazwisko rodowe		
- Informacje o odpisie**

Odpis jest zgodny z treścią aktu zgonu o oznaczeniu:

Miejsce sporządzenia odpisu
Data sporządzenia odpisu
Opłata skarbową
- Pieczęcie i podpis**

Własnoręczny podpis osoby wydającej odpis i pieczęć z imieniem, nazwiskiem i stanowiskiem służbowym.

Pieczęć urzędowa

Odpis skrócony aktu zgonu

strona 1/1

Where to register

You must register the death in the Civil Registry Office (*Urząd Stanu Cywilnego*) competent for the area **where the death occurred**.

For example, if a person's registered address is in Warsaw, but he or she died during vacation in Sopot, you must register the death in the Civil Registry Office in Sopot.

Who can register the death

Only the closest family members or their proxies can register the death.

You can **authorise a funeral home employee** to register the death on your behalf.

Required documents

You register the death by filling a death notification protocol (*protokół zgłoszenia zgonu*). The protocol is signed by the Registrar of the Civil Registry Office and by the person registering the death.

To register the death, you need:

- the **death card**¹ (*karta zgonu*) issued by the doctor, who pronounced the death
- the deceased person's identity card (*dowód osobisty*)
- your identity card or passport for identification
- if the death was a result of an [accident or a crime](#) - an approval from the prosecutor's office

¹(Polish: karta zgonu) a document issued by the doctor who pronounces the death in order to confirm the fact that someone died as well as the time and cause of death. It is necessary to register the death in the Civil Registry Office. The cause of death indicated in the death card can be important in case you want to receive life insurance benefits.

Cremation

Earth burials are still the most common type of burials in Poland, but cremation is becoming more and more popular. Around 30% of all funerals in Poland are ashes burials.

There are around 70 crematories in Poland. **If there is no crematory in your town**, the funeral home will transport the body to the nearest crematory and bring back the urn with ashes.

Cost of cremation

The total cost of a cremation and a post-cremation burial includes the following costs:

- a special **cremation coffin** (made of cardboard or wood, without metal fittings): from around PLN 200
- transport to the crematory: depending on the distance
- incineration of the body (cremation): between PLN 600 and PLN 1000
- **urn**: from around PLN 200
- the cemetery plot fee or the cost for placement in a columbarium
- burial: depending on the cemetery management

Burial of the ashes

According to the Polish law, the body **has to be buried** in an in-ground grave, a vault or catacombes, or at sea. In addition, remains in the form of ashes can be kept in a columbarium.

This is a closed list of burial options. It **doesn't include** the possibility of scattering the ashes, burying the urn outside of a cemetery / columbarium or keeping it at home.

Arranging the burial with the cemetery manager

To set the burial date and time, you have to contact the management of the cemetery:

- for a **municipal cemetery**: the municipal services department
- for a **parish cemetery**: the parish office

In case of a religious funeral, you also set the time of the funeral mass (memorial service in held in church).

Note: If there is no municipal cemetery in the area, the parish office can't prohibit the burial of a deceased person of other religion or a non-believer.

Cemetery plot fee

In order to bury the coffin or urn, you must have a **cemetery plot** - the land space used for the burial. Although people often talk about “buying a place at the cemetery”, you don't actually buy the plot. You lease it from the [cemetery management](#).

If you are getting a plot for the first time, you have sign a lease agreement and pay for **20 years**. After the initial 20 years, you can extend the right to use the plot for another 20 years.

The cost of the plot depends on the size of the plot (from 1 to 4 coffins) and the cemetery.

Note: The cemetery plot fee does not cover the fee for digging a grave or the fee for installing the tombstone. It only gives you the right to use the plot.

Cost of digging a grave

Note: All prices indicated in this guide are **approximate**, subject to change, and can vary depending on location, service providers as well as individual circumstances.

As in the case of every service, the cost of digging a grave can be very different depending on where the funeral takes place. You can expect any price from PLN 500 to PLN 1200.

Real-life case of unreasonably high fees

Since 2019, residents of Brzeziny protested against high fees for digging graves they had to pay to the management of the local cemetery (the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Łódź). The cost of digging a single grave was PLN 2000, although it was much lower in other cemeteries in that area.

People started suing the Archdiocese. In April 2022, as a result of a settlement, the Archdiocese agreed to return 80% of the fee for digging the grave to a woman who buried her husband. This was not the only case the cemetery manager had to return money for their services.

However, the Archdiocese of Łódź does not intend to change their pricelist.

(Source: [Kuria odda część pieniędzy za absurdalnie drogi pochówek. Kazali płacić jak za zboże](#))

Arranging the ceremony with the funeral home

Modern funeral homes offer a [wide range of services](#) necessary for the funeral ceremony and burial. **As soon as you receive the death card, the employees of a funeral home can help you at each step of the process.** You can authorise them, by signing proxy forms, to represent you in all matters related to organising the funeral.

Apart from helping you the legal formalities, the main services of a funeral home include **everything that is necessary for a funeral**, from preparing and dressing the body, through choosing a coffin and flower arrangements, to carrying the coffin and putting it in the grave, and tidying up after the funeral.

Choosing a coffin or urn

The funeral home employee will help you choose the right coffin or urn that will suit both your expectations and financial capabilities.

Choosing a coffin

The coffin (*trumna*) can be a big expense that adds to the total cost of the funeral. A simple pine coffin can be a few times cheaper than a oak coffin with decorative metal fittings.

Apart from the price, you need to consider the **size of the coffin** to fit the deceased person's height and weight. In some cases, you must order a special coffin, for example for a child or if the person was specially tall or heavy.

Cremation coffins are much cheaper than traditional coffins. They can be made of cardboard or wood, they are usually very simple, and they can have no metal fittings.

Choosing an urn

There is a wide variety of urn sizes, shapes and materials. The prices depend on all those factors.

In Poland, **there is an obligation** to put the ashes in the urn that is later buried in a grave or placed in a columbarium. You are not allowed to take keep urn at home, put the ashes in a different container, or scatter the ashes outdoors.

Funeral cross with a plate

A **funeral cross**, also called a procession cross, is traditionally used during a religious funeral. It is carried in front of the procession that goes from the church to the cemetery. In the cemetery, it is put in the ground next to the grave. After the funeral, it marks the grave until a tombstone is installed.

You can choose to have a **plate** with the name of the deceased person and their birth and death dates put on the cross by the funeral home. Optionally, you can get the plate somewhere else or order it online.

Preparing the body

Dressing the body

There is **no obligation** to dress the deceased person in special burial clothes. However, many people see dressing the deceased person in neat clothes as **paying respect** and part of saying „good-bye” in a proper way, even if the body gets cremated.

This can be done by a family member or by the funeral home employees.

If you wish, a **rosary or prayer book** can be placed in the deceased person's hands.

Putting on make-up

Aesthetic care of the body is becoming more and more popular in Poland. The aim of putting on some make-up on the deceased person's skin is that the relatives and loved ones remember them with the best possible appearance.

Embalming

Embalming the body (also called tanatopraxy) is **not obligatory** in Poland. Some people choose embalming the body if the death occurred in an accident or as a result of a disease. In some cases embalming can be combined with partial reconstruction.

Clothing for the deceased person

There is **no obligation** to dress the deceased person in special burial clothes. However, many people see dressing the deceased person in neat clothes as **paying respect** and part of saying „good-bye” in a proper way, even if the body gets cremated.

It is customary for the deceased person to be buried in an **elegant outfit**: a two-piece dress suit or a dress for a woman, and a suit for a man. The clothes don't

Chapter 2

have to be black, but **dark or neutral colours** are preferred. People who served in uniformed public services (police, fire services, armed forces) are often buried in **their uniforms** or formal dress uniforms.

The deceased person can be dressed by a family member (or members) or by the funeral home employees.

You can choose an outfit from the deceased person's clothes or get new clothing specially for the burial. Sometimes it is necessary to buy new clothes in a different size, either bigger or smaller, because of how the body changed, for example as a result of an illness.

Many funeral homes offer complete sets of clothes and accessories for the deceased, including:

- two-piece dress suits or a dresses
- suits
- blouses and shirts
- pump shoes and dress shoes
- scarves
- ties and pocket squares
- belts
- underwear
- pantyhose
- socks

Apart from the clothes, you can choose accessories, like:

- a rosary that is put in the deceased person's hands
- a small prayer book
- a white blanket to cover the lower part of the body

The advantages of buying burial clothes at the funeral home are:

- lower price compared to normal clothes shops
- getting all items in one place
- choosing the right size
- guarantee that the outfit is suitable for the occasion

If the body can't be dressed

In some cases the body of the deceased person **can't be dressed for the funeral**. This can be especially difficult when someone [dies of Covid-19](#), and the family is not allowed to see or dress the body.

If the body can't be properly dressed, you can pay respect to the deceased person by putting a white blanket with a rosary on top inside of the coffin. The employee will place a symbolic piece of clothing in the coffin before closing it.

Printing and publishing death notices

The funeral home can prepare and a **death notice** (*klepsydra*) - a short, informative obituary, usually in the form of an A4 announcement. It contains the person's name, their age, date of death, information about rosary prayers for them as well as the date and location of the funeral.

The funeral home hands out death notices on information boards at the entrance to the cemetery, the local church or churches and sometimes on the deceased person's house. Very often funeral homes also **publish the death notice** on their Facebook page, so it can be shared easily.

The death notice can include a photograph of the deceased person, but it's not obligatory. Most death notices in Poland don't have a picture.

The death notice may include additional information, e.g.:

- Information that the family doesn't want to receive condolences during the ceremony.
- You may ask to donate money for a cause, like the local hospice, instead of bringing traditional flowers. Typically, there will be people with donation boxes present during the funeral ceremony, collecting cash.

If you don't know the burial date yet

You can publish and hang out death notices **even if you don't know the burial date**, e.g. when there is a post-mortem examination, a police investigation, or

you have to bring the body from abroad.

In this case, the funeral home puts the following information in the death notice: “We will inform about the burial date as soon as possible”.

Preparing a farewell elegy

You can ask the funeral home to **prepare or help you prepare a farewell elegy** - a speech to commemorate the deceased person.

The elegy is **read out loud at the cemetery**, before the coffin or urn is placed in the grave. The elegy can be read by a member of the family or you can ask the funeral home to provide a person to read it.

Printing memorial cards

The custom of giving mourners **small memorial cards** after the funeral ceremony is becoming more and more popular in Poland.

The memorial card is more or less the size of a business card or credit card. One side contains a **picture**, usually a religious one. Some companies offer printing your own picture on the card.

The other side contains **information similar to the [death notice](#)**: the deceased person's name, their birth and death dates, and the burial date. In addition, there can be a short poem or prayer as well as information about a holy mass to commemorate the person, usually 30 days after the death.



Music

You can choose to use music **during the funeral ceremony**.

Funeral homes often offer **pre-recorded music** that can be used during in the chapel or farewell room as well as at the cemetery. They can also help you arrange **live music** - usually one or more trumpets or a violin.

Flower arrangements

You can easily find **florist shops near the cemetery**. Some funeral homes also have their own florist shops and offer a selection of prepared flower arrangements for you to choose from.

Types of flower arrangements

Traditionally, a **bouquet of fresh flowers** is placed on top of the coffin as decoration. You can also order a special flower arrangement to decorate the urn.

The family often chooses big **wreaths or wreaths and bouquets** in the same style that are placed next to the coffin during the funeral ceremony, both in church and at the cemetery.

Other mourners can choose smaller bouquets or wreaths. It is also common for a person, especially a child, to bring **a single flower**, e.g. a white rose.



Types of flowers

Traditional flowers that are bought for a funeral are: **roses**, dianthus flowers (pinks), lilies, calla lilies, transvaal daisies, and chrysanthemum.

Colours of flowers

White and **red** flowers are traditionally used in funeral flower arrangements. Many people choose other colours, like yellow, orange, pink, purple or even blue, but the colours shouldn't be too bright.

Funeral sash (ribbon)

The wreath, bouquet or single flower can be decorated with a **funeral sash** - a wide ribbon with a farewell message written on it. Traditional sash colours are white, gold, black, purple or red. Condolences or words of tribute are usually put on the funeral sash.

Here are a few examples that you could write on a funeral sash:

- Forever in our hearts
- With love and memories
- Forever missed, but never forgotten
- With our deepest sympathy
- In loving memory

The text can be followed by the names of the people who brought the flowers or just indicate their relation with the deceased person, e.g. „Loving wife” or „Colleagues”.

Organising a rosary prayer

A **rosary prayer** (*różaniec*) for the dead is a Catholic funeral rite that is held on the evening before the burial. Traditionally, it was held in the house of the deceased person, with the body still present - especially in the countryside. In some parts of Poland (e.g. in the Kashubia region) the rosary used to turn into an all-night vigil, called *pusta noc* (literally “empty night”, meaning quiet, left alone). This custom was still widely practised in the 80s in different parts of Poland.

Nowadays, the rosary prayer can be conducted at home, but most often it takes place in a church, chapel or a funeral parlour. It is open for everyone who wants to commemorate the deceased person.

You arrange the rosary prayer dates and times while setting a funeral service in the parish office or with the funeral home (if the rosary prayer is held in the funeral parlour). Information about the dates and time of the rosary prayer is included in the death notice.

One person is always **conducting the prayer**. It can be a family member, another lay person (e.g. a lady from the local church group, or a nun).

The rosary prayer can be held every evening between the death and the funeral. However, if the burial date is not known (e.g. when there is a post-mortem examination), you can wait until you know the date of the funeral and inform about the rosary prayer later. Usually, the rosary prayer takes place for three consecutive evenings before the day of the funeral.

Organising a post-funeral get together

Right after the funeral, the closest family of the deceased person invites the mourners to a *stypa*, also called *konsolacja* (consolation) - a short get-together at a restaurant.

During the meal, which is usually lunch and dessert, the mourners share memories of the deceased person. It is also an opportunity for distant family members to meet and talk.

Religious and secular burials

Poland is still a predominantly Catholic country and Most funeral ceremonies are religious ceremonies with a funeral mass. However, there are more and more secular burials every year, and an appropriate ceremony can be arranged, depending on the wishes of the deceased person or their family. There are even companies that specialise in secular burials, especially in cities.

Note: If there is no municipal cemetery in the area, the parish office can't prohibit the burial of a deceased person of other religion or a non-believer.

Funeral officiant fee

Religious burial

Officially, there is no fee for a religious burial, and you can pay the parish as much as you want as a “thank you”. In reality, you must be prepared to pay a few hundred zlotys.

The fee for a funeral mass and the burial ceremony conducted by a priest depends on the location and is usually around PLN 500-1000 (the average price is PLN 800).

Secular burial

The amount of the officiant fee depends on who leads the ceremony. The services of a professional Master of Ceremony are more expensive. The funeral can also be conducted by a trained employee of the funeral home.

Funeral customs in Poland

How to behave when someone dies

The traditional way of dealing with death is to mourn and be sad. People express their condolences and offer help and support to the family of the deceased person. During the get-together after the funeral, called *stypa*, the focus is more on happy memories related with the deceased person.

Informing about the death

Obituary (*nekrolog* / *klepsydra*)

You can inform the public about someone's death by publishing an obituary (*nekrolog*) in a newspaper or on the internet, or hang out special death notices (*klepsydra*).

Death notices are prepared by the funeral home and hanged on information boards at the entrance to the cemetery, the local church or churches and sometimes on the deceased person's house. Funeral homes also publish the death notice on their Facebook page, so it can be shared easily.

Klepsydra is a short, informative obituary, usually in the form of an A4 announcement. It contains the persons's name, their age, date of death, information about rosary prayers for them as well as the date and location of the funeral.

The death notice can include a photograph of the deceased person, but it's not obligatory. Most death notices in Poland don't have a picture.

The death notice may include additional information, e.g.:

- "Rodzina prosi o nieskładanie kondolencji" or "Prosimy o nieskładanie kondolencji", which means that the family doesn't want to receive condolences during the ceremony.
- "Zamiast kwiatów..." - "Instead of flowers...". Instead of bringing the traditional flowers, the family may ask to donate money for a cause, like the local hospice. Typically, there will be people with donation boxes present during the funeral ceremony, collecting cash.



Informing family and friends

Then someone dies, the information about the planned funeral is passed on to other family members and friends. If you can think of somebody who knew the deceased person and would probably like to pay their respects, inform them. Not everyone visits the places, where death notices are published, and the closest family members may be too shocked to remember about everybody.

If you don't know the burial date yet

You can publish and hang out death notices even if you don't know the burial date, e.g. when there is a post-mortem examination, a police investigation, or you have to bring the body from abroad.

In this case, the funeral home puts the following information in the death notice: "We will inform about the burial date as soon as possible".

Rosary prayers before the funeral

A **rosary prayer** (*róžaniec*) for the dead is a Catholic funeral rite that is held on the evening before the burial. Traditionally, it was held in the house of the deceased person, with the body still present - especially in the countryside. In some parts of Poland (e.g. in the Kashubia region) the rosary used to turn into an

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Condolences

Expressing condolences

You can express your sympathy for people who are in pain after losing a loved one by saying „My condolences” or simply „I’m sorry”.

Sometimes, the family doesn’t want to receive condolences. In this case, the priest or officiant may express this wish, or it can be included in the death notice (*klepsydra*):

“Rodzina prosi o nieskładanie kondolencji”.

Condolence card

It is not customary to send condolence cards in Poland, but it is slowly becoming popular to express your condolences in writing. If you live far away and cannot take part in the funeral, you can send a condolence card to the family of the deceased person.

How to dress for a funeral

Nowadays, the rules regarding funeral clothing are not as strict as they used to be, but you are still expected to dress in a neat and respectful way. It is advisable to choose clothes that are conservative and respectful.

Family members should wear **black clothes**. Black is the most traditional colour associated with death and mourning in Poland.

In general, adults and teenagers show their mourning by wearing black or dark clothing and shoes. Other colours you can traditionally wear to a funeral are navy blue, dark grey, brown. You can combine dark outerwear with a white shirt or blouse.

Wearing bright or colourful clothes by an adult may be considered disrespectful.

These rules are not obligatory for children.

What to bring to a funeral

Flowers

Traditionally, the mourners bring flowers. You can choose single flowers, funeral bouquets or wreaths. The closer you were to the person who died, the bigger the flower composition.

White flowers are most common. Other colours are allowed, like yellow, pink or purple, but they shouldn't be too bright.

The flowers are placed on the grave right after the funeral ceremony.

Instead of flowers

If the family specifically asks not to bring flowers and donate money for a cause instead, you can bring some cash for the collection that will be organised during the ceremony.

After the funeral

There are **a few things you must take care of** after the funeral:

- Right after the burial, the grave is covered with flowers. After 1-2 weeks you must tidy the tomb. Before a tombstone is installed, a wooden frame can be used.
- After around 6 months, you can install a **tombstone**.
- You can arrange [grave care services](#) to keep the tombstone tidy.

Tidy the tomb

Right after the burial, the grave is covered with the flowers that were brought by the family and other mourners. According to an old custom, you should leave the flowers on the grave for 6 weeks. But because the flowers decay faster than that, they are usually cleaned after 1-2 weeks.

You can choose to tidy the tomb on your own or **have the funeral home take care of it** (see [Services of a funeral home](#)).

You should wait **around 6 months** after the funeral before you [put a tombstone](#) on the grave. In the meantime, you can use a temporary wooden frame instead, along with the temporary wooden cross that was used during the funeral. The temporary frame helps to keep the tomb tidy until a gravestone is installed.

The cost of a wooden frame is around PLN 250-400. To reduce the cost, you can ask for the possibility to reuse a frame that was already used.

Note: All prices indicated in this guide are **approximate**, subject to change, and can vary depending on location, service providers as well as individual circumstances.

Choose a tombstone

You should wait **around 6 months** after the burial before you put a tombstone on the grave. Some people decide not to install a tombstone and leave the temporary frame for a longer time because of the costs related to installing the tombstone.

The tombstone itself is not the only cost you must cover to have a tombstone installed on the grave. After paying for other expenses related to the funeral, the funeral grant will most likely not cover this expense.

Note: All prices indicated in this guide are **approximate**, subject to change, and can vary depending on location, service providers as well as individual circumstances.

Cost of installing a tombstone:

- the tombstone: around PLN 3000-7000, depending on the size and material
- installation of the tombstone: around PLN 500-700
- a tombstone installation fee paid to the cemetery management: around **10% of the price** of the tombstone

Note: To avoid the high cost of a traditional tombstone, you can get a tombstone or tomb frame made of plastic or composite material.

Arrange grave care services

If you are not able to take care of the tombstone, funeral homes offer grave care services.

The include:

- removing old flowers and grave candles;
- tidying the immediate surrounding of the grave;
- washing the tombstone;
- using special grave care products;
- putting fresh flowers on the grave;
- planting flowers on or around the tombstone;
- lighting a grave candle.

You can choose what services you need and how many times a year you want them.

The funeral home can **send you a picture as proof** of completion of the service.

Total cost of the burial

The total cost of a burial depends on the products and services you choose, the time between the death and the burial, as well as the location - prices are very different in towns and cities, and between particular service providers.

The funeral benefit, that is a **maximum of four thousand Polish zlotys** (PLN 4,000.00), does not cover all expenses.

If you want to make the total cost of the burial as low as possible, you can resign from things that are not required. Here is a list of necessary expenses you can't avoid:

- transport and storage of the body;
- a coffin - even if you choose cremation, the body must be put in a coffin;
- in case of cremation: the incineration and an urn;
- cemetery plot fee and fee for digging the grave, or paying for placement of the urn in a columbarium;
- the funeral service provided by the funeral home;
- in case of a religious funeral - the funeral officiant (priest) fee.

Note: Check if the VAT invoice you get from the funeral home **includes the word "coffin"** (*trumna*). This is necessary to receive the funeral grant.

Funeral grant

The funeral grant, or funeral allowance, is paid **to cover documented funeral expenses**.

If the funeral costs were incurred by a family member of the deceased, they are entitled to the grant in full amount of **PLN 4,000.00**. It is not important what the actual expenses were.

Note: If the funeral costs were covered **by a person from outside of the family** (e.g. neighbour, employer) or an entity (e.g. a social welfare facility, municipality, poviát, church or religious association), the funeral grant is payable **in the amount of documented funeral costs**, but no more than the maximum of PLN 4,000.00. For example, if the documented costs are PLN 2,500.00, the person only gets PLN 2,500.00.

What is the amount of the funeral grant

The maximum amount of the funeral grant is **PLN 4,000.00** (around EUR 850,00).

The amount of the grant is **fixed** - it doesn't matter what contributions were paid to the social insurance company or what the actual cost of the funeral was.

Even if you spend more and provide proof (VAT invoice) for a bigger amount, the social insurance still equals PLN 4000,00 (four thousand Polish zloty).

Conditions for receiving the funeral grant

The funeral grant is paid in case of the death of:

- an insured person
- a retired person
- a (disability) pensioner
- members of their families
- persons who fulfilled the conditions for a pension

The funeral grant is also paid when:

- the insured person dies after the end of insurance
- the death occurred when receiving sickness allowance, rehabilitation benefit or maternity allowance

Note: You receive the funeral grant for the “**cost of funeral**”, not for the burial. This means that you can apply for the funeral grant even if the body was never found. **If a person is legally declared dead** by a court, there is a funeral ceremony, and you cover the expenses, **you are entitled to the funeral grant**.

Who is entitled to the funeral grant

The funeral grant is paid to:

- a family member;
- the employer;
- the nursing home;
- the commune (gmina);
- the poviast (powiat);
- a church or religious organisation;
- a strange person

if they covered the cost of the funeral. If the costs were incurred by several persons or entities, the funeral grant is divided among them in proportion to their share.

Family members entitled to the funeral grant are:

- wife or husband (even in separation);
- parents, step-parents;
- own children, children of the spouse, adopted children;
- children in foster care;
- other children who were raised by the deceased and are under 18 years old;

- brother or sister;
- grandparents;
- grandchildren;
- persons remaining in the deceased person's custody.

Where to apply

You apply for the funeral grant to **the institution that provided social security** to the deceased person or, if this person was not insured, the institution that provides social security to you.

Institutions providing social security:

- Social Insurance Institution - Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych (ZUS)
- Agricultural Social Insurance Fund - Kasa Rolniczego Ubezpieczenia Społecznego (KRUS)
- Pension Office of the Ministry of Interior and Administration - Zakład Emerytalno-Rentowy MSWiA
- Pension Office of Prison Service - Biuro Emerytalne Służby Więziennej
- Military Pension Office - Wojskowe Biuro Emerytalne

Most people in Poland are insured in the **Social Insurance Institution** (employees, entrepreneurs) and the **Agricultural Social Insurance Fund** (farmers).

When to apply

You must apply for the funeral grant **within 12 months of the date of death** indicated in the death card. After 12 months the right to the funeral grant expires.

This term is only prolonged in special cases:

- when the body is discovered later
- when the identification of the body takes more time
- other circumstances beyond of your control

In such cases you can apply for the funeral grant within 12 months of the date of the burial.

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How to apply

You can apply for the funeral grant yourself by filling out an applicaiton form used by the given social insurance institution. Be sure to take [all the required documents](#) with you.

You can authorise the funeral home to apply for the grant on your behalf. **It is possible for the funeral home to “credit” the funeral cost up to the amount of the funeral grant**, so that you only have to pay any costs over PLN 4000,00.

Note: If you apply for the funeral grant in the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS), you must singn the application form in the presence of the KRUS office worker.

Even if you choose to apply for the funeral grant yourself, the funeral home employee can help you with filling out the application form.

What documents are required

Documents required to collect the funeral allowance from the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) and the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS):

- abridged copy of the death certificate
- **proof of insurance** (issued by the Social Insurance Institution or the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund) or a statement from the employer
- identity card of the deceased person
- identity card of the family member who applies for the funeral grant
- **VAT invoices** to confirm the funeral expenses

VAT invoice

You need VAT invoices from the funeral home, the cemetery management, florist shop or other entity to confirm any expenses for the funeral ceremony and burial.

Note: Check if the VAT invoice you get from the funeral home **includes the word “coffin”** (*trumna*). This is necessary to receive the funeral grant.

Legal foundation

The legal basis for organising burials in Poland is provided by:

- the [Cemeteries and Burials Act](#) (Journal of Laws - Dz. U. of 1959, no. 11, item 62, as amended); a new Act is planned to enter into force in June 2022
- the [Vital Records Act](#) (Journal of Laws - Dz. U. of 2014, item 1741 as amended)
- the Regulation of the Minister of Health of 7 December 2001 on dealing with human body and remains (Journal of Laws - Dz. U. of 2001 no. 153, item 1783)
- the Regulation of the Minister of Health of 23 March 2011 on dealing with human body and remains (Journal of Laws - Dz. U. of 2011 no. 75, item 405)
- the Regulation of the Minister of Health of 3 April 2020 changing the regulation on dealing with human body and remains (Journal of Laws - Dz. U. of 2020, item 585)

New 2022 Cemeteries and Burials Act

A new Act on Cemeteries and Burials is planned to be adopted in June 2022.

The proposed changes include:

- the **introduction of electronic documents**, which will reduce the amount of paper documents required in the process
- including a **life partner** on the list of people who can organise the burial
- the possibility to **legally scatter the ashes**, which is currently not approved by law
- the possibility of burying the ashes in a **biodegradable urn**

Cemeteries and Burials Act of 31 January 1959

Burials in Poland are regulated by the Act of Cemeteries and Burials (Journal of Laws - Dz. U. of 1959, no. 11, item 62, as amended).

The Act sets out rules regulating, among others, the following aspects of a burial:

- how to handle the body of the deceased - in Articles 9 and 12
- what information must be included in the death card - in Article 11
- who can organise the burial - in Article 10
- the rules of transporting the body abroad or bringing the body from abroad - in Article 14
- the period in which a grave cannot be used again for burial - in Article 7;
- exhumation - in Article 15

Full version of the Act (in Polish) is available [here](#).

Vital Records Act of 28 November 2014

According to the Polish Vital Records Act:

- deaths are registered by the head of the civil registry office competent for the place where the death occurred or the body was found - Article 13.2
- the death must be registered within 3 days of receiving the death card - Article 93.1
- if the death was caused by an infectious disease, it must be registered within 24 hours - Article 93.1
- a death certificate is issued on the day the death is registered - Article 92.1
- the death certificate is drawn up in accordance with the death card and a death registration protocol - Article 92.2

Chapter 2

- if the head of the civil registry office is not able to communicate with the people who want to register the death, he or she **must provide an interpreter** - Article 32.1
- in case of a stillborn, instead of a death certificate, the office issues a still-born birth certificate that contains the information that the child was born dead - Article 52.2

The Act also regulates the registry of deaths that occur on a Polish ship or aircraft, during active military service or that are pronounced as a result of court proceedings.

Exhumation

Sometimes it's necessary to take the body of the deceased person out of the grave. This is called **exhumation**.

Exhumation is performed:

- on a **justified request** of the people who can arrange a burial, if the competent Sanitary Inspector approves
- upon an order of the Prosecutor's Office or a court order
- based on the decision of the competent Sanitary Inspector, if the cemetery land is going to be used for a different purpose

(Article 15 of the Cemeteries and Burials Act)

Exhumation is only possible **between 16 October and 15 April** and is performed in early morning hours.

(Regulation of the Minister of Health of 7 December 2001)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- **What should I wear for a funeral?**

Refer to the **How to dress for a funeral** paragraph in the [Funeral customs in Poland](#) section.

- **How much is the funeral grant in Poland?**

The maximum amount of the funeral grant you can receive is PLN 4,000.00. For more information, read the section describing [the amount of the funeral grant](#) in detail.

- **Is the funeral grant enough to cover all costs?**

Unfortunately, **the funeral grant may not cover all expenses related to the funeral**. For more information, read the section that sums up the [total cost of the burial](#).

- **How much does a funeral cost in Poland?**

Refer to the section that sums up the [total cost of the burial](#).

Note: All prices indicated in this guide are **approximate**, subject to change, and can vary depending on location, service providers as well as individual circumstances.

- **What is the difference between *karta zgonu* and *akt zgonu*?**

The **death card** (*karta zgonu*) is **issued by the doctor who pronounces the death** in order to confirm the fact that someone died as well as the **time and cause of death**. It is necessary to register the death in the Civil Registry Office. The cause of death indicated in the death card can be important in case you want to receive **life insurance benefits**.

Note: Make a xerox copy of the death card. It is the only document that indicates the cause of death. You may need this information later, for example in order to receive life insurance benefits.

After you register the death, you get the **death certificate** (*akt zgonu*). The death certificate is an official document entered into the Civil Registry. You need the death certificate **to organise the funeral** and **apply for the funeral grant**.

■ Can there be an open casket during the funeral?

No. Moving and transporting the body in an open casket is forbidden in Poland. You can see the deceased person in the funeral home before the coffin is closed. After that, the coffin can't be opened during the funeral.

■ Can I scatter the ashes?

No, you can't scatter the ashes in Poland. The current law does not allow scattering the ashes. The urn **has to be buried or kept in a columbarium**. However, this may change in June 2022, when the new Cemeteries and Burials Act enters into force.

▪ Do I have to buy the plot for 20 years?

You don't buy the plot (you don't become the owner), but **get the right to use the plot for 20 years**. According to law, and for sanitation reasons, the 20 year period is the time after which the plot can be re-used for another burial. So **you have to pay for 20 years of plot usage**, and then resign or extend the right to use it for another 10 or 20 years.

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Chapter 2

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Glossary

D

death card

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death certificate

(Polish: akt zgonu) is an official document entered into the Civil Registry. You need the death certificate to organise the funeral and apply for the funeral grant.

H

hearse

also called a funeral car, a special vehicle designed to transport the body of a deceased person in a coffin or transport capsule

M

morgue

or mortuary, a cold place used for storage of human bodies before the burial or autopsy

