



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor



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Oregon State Police has partnered with the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification (UNT-CHI) for over 10 years to process and upload missing person (MP) and unidentified person (UP) DNA profiles into the national CODIS system. Unfortunately, through an extensive re-allocation of federal funds at the National Institute of Justice, **the UNT-CHI can no longer process ANY missing person or unidentified remains biological samples outside the state of Texas.** Moving forward, please use the following guidelines for sample submission to OSP.

## Missing Person Samples:

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Oregon State Police-Forensic Services Division will resume analysis of Missing Person reference samples and will accept the submission of samples under new, stricter guidelines. The following types of biological samples related to missing persons cases can be submitted to the OSP DNA Unit:

- Oral swab standards from **PARENTS or OFFSPRING** of the missing person (“Family Reference Standards” or FRS). If submitting oral swab standards from offspring, an oral swab standard from the other biological parent should also be submitted when available. Submission of these samples also requires the completion and submission of a Missing Persons Program Reference Sample Submission Form or the equivalent UNT-CHI form.
- Direct Reference standards (toothbrushes, razor, hairbrush, etc. known to have been used only by the missing person)

Please note that **only oral swabs from PARENTS or OFFSPRING** of missing persons may be submitted to OSP. Also, the direct reference standard must be an object or implement known to have been used only by the missing person.

All other types of biological reference evidence from missing persons will not be accepted by the Oregon State Police.

Private DNA laboratories throughout the country are available to process missing person samples from more-distant relatives for a fee.

*In missing person investigations, the collection and retention of MP antemortem dental records, MP fingerprint records and MP medical records is crucial. Because DNA analysis for Oregon unidentified remains cases will be limited, these types of antemortem records are necessary and invaluable in identifying unidentified remains; every effort should be made to collect and retain these documents when beginning missing person inquiries.*

## Unidentified Remains Samples:

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The State Medical Examiner's Office will attempt to identify any unidentified remains through standardized, well-known and accurate methods such as visual recognition, dental x-ray comparisons, friction ridge detail (fingerprint) collection and comparison, circumstantial evidence, medical history and association with surgical hardware, etc. Until further notice, pathologists will continue to collect biological samples for DNA, but DNA analysis on unidentified remains will not be routine.

If an identification is tentative, and the Law Enforcement Agency has collected FRS for comparison to unidentified remains<sup>1</sup>, then a request for DNA analysis will be submitted through the Medical Examiner's Office Human Identification Program (Dr. Nici Vance, [nici.vance@osp.oregon.gov](mailto:nici.vance@osp.oregon.gov)).

Please contact Dr. Vance with any questions regarding your Missing Person or Unidentified Person casework.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### 1. How are remains normally identified? Is DNA the best way to identify human remains?

- Decedents are identified at the Medical Examiner's Office every day through visual means, comparison of tattoos and scars, fingerprint/friction ridge detail comparison, surgical hardware compared to medical records, circumstantial evidence, witness statements, and identified personal items.
- Comparison of antemortem dental records/x-rays to postmortem dental records/x-rays is probably the most common way to identify unrecognizable and/or decomposed remains. Collecting and maintaining these types of antemortem records is imperative in missing person investigations.
- DNA analysis can be used to provide compelling statistical support to a possible identification, but it is only one of many identification techniques. Ultimately, it is the Medical Examiner/ Forensic Pathologist who confirms the identity of a decedent, not the DNA analyst/ fingerprint analyst/odontologist.

### 2. Will the OSP DNA Unit be entering Missing Person DNA profiles into CODIS?

- Yes, the OSP DNA Unit will enter the FRS of parents and offspring of missing persons into CODIS.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the strict limitations in OSP services, DNA cannot be processed on unidentified remains unless FRS of a parent and/or offspring of the possible decedent are submitted also for possible association. The OSP DNA Unit does not have the ability to process DNA from bones or teeth, only soft tissue samples.

- Yes, the OSP DNA Unit will enter the direct reference standard of missing persons into CODIS.
- 3. What if my missing person's parents are dead, they have no offspring, and I am in contact with their sibling(s)? What if my missing person only has aunts and uncles available for family reference standard collection?**
- Family Reference Standards should be collected from these individuals during a missing person investigation. A private DNA laboratory will have the capability to process DNA from these individuals, upload the DNA profiles into CODIS, and interpret any possible matches. This will involve a fee for your agency.
- 4. Will the OSP DNA Unit be entering Unidentified Person DNA profiles into CODIS if we have no leads as to the identity of the deceased?**
- Because the OSP DNA Unit does not have the ability to interpret complex kinship relationships, analysis of these sample types at a private laboratory is preferred. In rare circumstances, coordinated through the Medical Examiner's Office Human Identification Program, the OSP DNA Unit may enter an Unidentified Person DNA profile into CODIS but the searches pertaining to those profiles will be limited.
- 5. If I submit oral swabs to OSP from a sibling/cousin/aunt/uncle of the missing person, is that enough for DNA analysis?**
- OSP cannot accept family reference standards from distant relatives. Only FRS from parents of the missing person or offspring of the missing person will be accepted by OSP for DNA analysis and entry into CODIS. As stated in FAQ #3, a private DNA laboratory will have the capability to process DNA from these individuals and enter the DNA profiles into CODIS. This will involve a fee-for-service for your agency.
- 6. Why can't the OSP DNA Unit process these Family Reference Standards?**
- OSP cannot make comparisons to standards from siblings, aunts/uncles, grandparents, etc. using traditional DNA analysis. The OSP DNA Unit does not have the ability to interpret complex kinship relationships.
  - If swabs of additional biological relatives have been collected, please retain them as evidence for possible analysis by a private DNA laboratory.
- 7. If DNA analysis is the only means left to identify unidentified remains, then how will DNA be processed and who will perform the analysis?**
- The OSP DNA Unit will continue to assist with the identification of human remains using soft tissue samples (no bone or teeth) collected at autopsy. OSP can only process deceased samples if direct reference standards from a missing person thought to be the deceased (see examples above) and/or standards from their parents and/or offspring (family reference standards) can be collected and submitted as well.

- If a body persists in being unidentified and is in a state of advanced decomposition or completely skeletonized, the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office will actively explore additional ways to facilitate DNA services for law enforcement agencies. One of these ways is the submission of a biological sample to a private DNA laboratory that also uploads DNA profiles into CODIS. Eligibility will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis if DNA processing is the only method available for possible investigative leads regarding decedent identity.

***If you have additional questions, need guidance on a missing person/unidentified remains case, or would like more information on private DNA laboratories, please contact Dr. Nici Vance, OSP Human Identification Program Coordinator at***

***[nici.vance@osp.oregon.gov](mailto:nici.vance@osp.oregon.gov)***