Massachusetts Probate Timeline & Key Deadlines

The main milestones and legal deadlines when settling an estate in Massachusetts.

Every estate is different, and dates depend on your specific situation. Use this as a map of the road ahead — not as legal advice. Deadlines below are set by the Massachusetts Uniform Probate Code (M.G.L. c. 190B) and the Department of Revenue.

RIGHT AWAY	**Get organized.** Order several **certified copies of the death certificate** from the city/town clerk where the death occurred. Locate the **original will**, secure the home and valuables, and forward the mail. You'll need certified death certificates for almost every step.
AFTER 7 DAYS	**Informal probate can begin.** A magistrate can allow an informal probate no sooner than 7 days after death, and you must give written notice to interested parties **at least 7 days before** filing (Form MPC 550). M.G.L. c. 190B § 3-306 / § 3-307.
AFTER 30 DAYS	**Small-estate option.** If there is **no real estate** and $25,000 or less in personal property (excluding one vehicle), you may use **Voluntary Administration** (Form MPC 170) 30+ days after death. A much simpler path when it applies.
WITHIN 3 MONTHS	**File the Inventory.** Within 3 months of your appointment, the personal representative prepares the **Inventory** (Form MPC 854) — a list of the estate's assets and their date-of-death values. M.G.L. c. 190B § 3-706. (Our free Estate Inventory Worksheet helps here.)
WITHIN 9 MONTHS	**Estate tax, if it applies.** The **Massachusetts Estate Tax Return (Form M-706)** and any tax are due 9 months after death **if the gross estate plus adjusted taxable gifts exceeds $2,000,000**. The federal return (Form 706) is also due at 9 months, but only for very large estates. Mass. DOR, deaths on/after 1/1/2023. A 6-month filing extension is available if 80% of the tax is paid on time.
WITHIN 1 YEAR	**Creditor claim window closes.** Creditors' claims against the estate are generally barred one year after the **date of death**. Pay valid debts before distributing assets to heirs. M.G.L. c. 190B § 3-803.
WITHIN 3 YEARS	**Deadline to start probate.** Aside from limited exceptions, a probate must be commenced within 3 years of the death. M.G.L. c. 190B § 3-108.
TO CLOSE	**Account & close.** After debts, taxes, and distributions are handled, file the **Account** (Form MPC 853) and close the estate — an informal closing statement, or a petition for complete settlement in formal cases.

SOURCES (ALL OFFICIAL)

Mass.gov — **File an informal probate for an estate** · **MUPC Estate Administration Procedural Guide** · **Massachusetts Estate Tax Guide** · **File a voluntary administration for an estate**

Massachusetts General Laws c. 190B §§ 3-108, 3-306/307, 3-706, 3-803 · M.G.L. c. 65C (estate tax)