

Guidance for Certifying COVID-19 Deaths

With the WHO declaring COVID-19 a pandemic and subsequent increasing mortality from the virus worldwide, there is increased importance on certifying these deaths correctly.

1. RECORDING COVID-19 ON THE MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF CAUSE OF DEATH

COVID-19 should be recorded on the medical certificate of cause of death for ALL decedents where the disease caused, or is assumed to have caused, or contributed to death.

2. TERMINOLOGY

The use of official terminology, as recommended by the World Health Organization, i.e. **COVID-19**, should be used for all certification of this cause of death.

As there are many types of coronaviruses it is recommended not to use “coronavirus” in place of COVID-19. This will help to reduce uncertainty for coding and monitoring these deaths which may lead to underreporting.

3. CHAIN OF EVENTS

Due to the public health importance of COVID-19, when it is thought to have caused or contributed to death it should be recorded in Part I of the medical certificate of cause of death.

Specification of the causal sequence leading to death in Part I of the certificate is also important. For example, in cases when COVID-19 causes pneumonia and fatal respiratory distress, both pneumonia and respiratory distress should be included along with COVID-19 in Part I. Certifiers should include as much detail as possible based on their knowledge of the case, medical records, laboratory testing, etc.

Here, on a generic model form, is an example of how to certify this chain of events in Part I:

CAUSE OF DEATH (See instructions and examples)		Approximate interval: Onset to death
<p>32. PART I. Enter the <u>chain of events</u>—diseases, injuries, or complications—that directly caused the death. DO NOT enter terminal events such as cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, or ventricular fibrillation without showing the etiology. DO NOT ABBREVIATE. Enter only one cause on a line. Add additional lines if necessary.</p> <p>IMMEDIATE CAUSE (Final disease or condition resulting in death) → a. <u>Acute respiratory distress syndrome</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):</p> <p>Sequentially list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed on line a. Enter the UNDERLYING CAUSE (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death) LAST</p> <p>b. <u>Pneumonia</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):</p> <p>c. <u>COVID-19</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):</p> <p>d. _____</p>		<p>2 days</p> <p>10 days</p> <p>10 days</p>
<p>PART II. Enter other <u>significant conditions contributing to death</u> but not resulting in the underlying cause given in PART I.</p>		<p>33. WAS AN AUTOPSY PERFORMED? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>35. DID TOBACCO USE CONTRIBUTE TO DEATH? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Probably <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown</p>		<p>34. WERE AUTOPSY FINDINGS AVAILABLE TO COMPLETE THE CAUSE OF DEATH? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>36. IF FEMALE: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant within past year <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant at time of death <input type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant, but pregnant within 42 days of death <input type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant, but pregnant 43 days to 1 year before death <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown if pregnant within the past year</p>		<p>37. MANNER OF DEATH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Homicide <input type="checkbox"/> Accident <input type="checkbox"/> Pending Investigation <input type="checkbox"/> Suicide <input type="checkbox"/> Could not be determined</p>

4. CO-MORBIDITIES

There is increasing evidence that people with existing chronic conditions or compromised immune systems due to disability are at greater risk of death due to COVID-19. Chronic conditions may be non-communicable diseases such as coronary artery disease, COPD, and diabetes or disabilities. If the decedent had existing chronic conditions, such as those listed above, these should be listed in Part II of the medical certificate of cause of death.

Examples below:

Medical data: Part 1 and 2			
Disease or condition directly leading to death. Antecedent Causes that gave rise to the above cause, stating the underlying cause on the lowest line	1	Cause of death	Interval between onset and death
	A	Acute respiratory distress syndrome	2 days
	B	Pneumonia	10 days
	C	COVID-19	10 days
D	Diagnosis that started the chain of events		
Other significant conditions contributing to death but not related to the diseases or conditions causing it	2	Coronary artery disease, Type 2 Diabetes, COPD	

Medical data: Part 1 and 2			
Disease or condition directly leading to death. Antecedent Causes that gave rise to the above cause, stating the underlying cause on the lowest line	1	Cause of death	Interval between onset and death
	A	Acute respiratory distress syndrome	2 days
	B	Pneumonia	10 days
	C	COVID-19	10 days
	D	Diagnosis that started the chain of events	
Other significant conditions contributing to death but not related to the diseases or conditions causing it	2	U Cerebral palsy	

Medical data: Part 1 and 2			
Disease or condition directly leading to death. Antecedent Causes that gave rise to the above cause, stating the underlying cause on the lowest line	1	Cause of death	Interval between onset and death
	A	Acute respiratory distress syndrome	2 days
	B	Pneumonia	10 days
	C	COVID-19	10 days
	D	Diagnosis that started the chain of events	
Other significant conditions contributing to death but not related to the diseases or conditions causing it	2	U Diffuse large B cell lymphoma, Immunosuppressant therapy	