

## Filling and Completing the Death Notification/ Death Certificate Form

Death Notification/ Certification information is a permanent record of death. It is usually important for burial and settlement of the deceased's estate. It provides legal evidence that the person has died and states the cause of death. This means that the death can be formally registered. It also provides family members with closure and peace of mind.

It is vital that the information on the certificate is correct. Death certificates are needed and also used to

1. Assess the general health of the population
2. Assess the prevalence of medical problems among specific groups
3. Recognize areas where medical research may have greatest impact
4. Gather statistics about death

### Basic guidelines in filling and completing the Death Notification/ Death Certificate Form.

#### Physician's Responsibility

Certification and completion of death certificates is primary responsibility of the physician. On the certificate, the physician must certify:

- The cause or causes of death to the best of his/her knowledge and belief.
- The certificate must be completed by the physician most fully informed about the last illness of the deceased so that he or she can fill in the certificate as fully and accurately as possible.

#### Time and Place of Death

- Time of Death - Write the time of death as accurately as possible. This can be needed for legal reasons.
- Place of Death - Record exactly where the person died (for example, the name of the hospital). This may not be the same as the place where you are filling in the certificate.

#### The Cause of Death Statement

This section of the certificate is divided into two parts.

##### Part I.

This part asks for sequential chain of events that led to death and the time interval between onset of a condition and death.

- State the immediate cause of death.
- Work back logically to the disease or condition that started the process.
- Then write the main disease that led to death. This is also known as the underlying cause of death and it is significant information for epidemiological purposes.

## Part II.

This part states any significant condition or diseases or accidents that contributed to the death which was not part of the sequence leading directly to death.

### In summary:

<b>Part 1.</b> The <u>chain of events</u> injuries or complications that directly cause 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.	Approximate interval: Onset to death
<b>A. IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF DEATH: “most recent condition”</b> (Final disease condition resulting in death): Due to (or consequence of)	
<b>B. INTERVENING CAUSE OF DEATH “Next oldest condition”</b> (Sequentially list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed in line A). Due to (or consequence of)	
<b>C. INTERVENING CAUSE OF DEATH “Next oldest condition”</b> (Sequentially list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed above). Due to (or consequence of)	
<b>D. UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH “oldest, original, initiating condition”</b> (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death), entered <b>LAST</b> .	
<b>Part II.</b> Other significant conditions contributing to death but not resulting in the underlying cause of death given in Part I.	

## Examples

<b>Part I.</b> Enter the <u>chain of events</u> injuries or complications that directly cause 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.	Approximate interval: Onset to death
<b>IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF DEATH:</b> (Final disease condition resulting in death): a. <u>Acute rupture of the septal myocardium</u> Due to (or consequence of)	Minutes
Sequentially list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed in line a. b. <u>Acute myocardial infarct</u> Due to (or consequence of)	6 days
c. <u>Thrombosis of the coronary artery</u> Due to (or consequence of)	6 days
Enter the <b>UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH</b> (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death <b>LAST</b> ). d. <u>Arteriosclerotic coronary artery disease</u>	7 years
<b>Part II.</b> Enter <u>other significant conditions contributing to death</u> but not resulting in the underlying cause given in <b>Part I</b> . <b>Diabetes, Hypertensive cardiovascular disease</b>	

<b>Part I.</b> Enter the <u>chain of events</u> injuries or complications that directly cause 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.	Approximate interval: Onset to death
<b>IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF DEATH:</b> (Final disease condition resulting in death): a. <u>Acute bronchopneumonia due to Streptococcus pneumoniae</u> Due to (or consequence of)	2 days
Sequentially list conditions, if any leading to the cause listed in line a. b. <u>Spinal cord transection with quadriplegia</u> Due to (or consequence of)	12 years
c. <u>Cervical vertebral fracture</u> Due to (or consequence of)	12 years
Enter the <b>UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH</b> (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death <b>LAST</b> ). d. <u>Motor vehicle accident</u>	12 years

#### UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH:

- The main sequence of conditions leading to the death. State the disease or condition that led directly to death on line I(a), and work your way back in time through what led to this condition (the antecedents) until reaching the underlying cause of death.
- Underlying cause of death - which started the chain of events leading to death.
- The lowest completed line in Part 1 should contain the underlying cause of death.

#### For Example - a sequence of conditions leading to death

You should fill in Part 1 of the certificate as follows:

Example 1. Sequence of conditions leading to death	
Part 1	
Disease condition that led directly to death	a) Congestive heart failure
Intermediate cause of death	b) Myocardial infarction
Intermediate cause of death	c) Coronary atherosclerosis
Underlying cause of death	d) Metastatic prostate carcinoma with pathologic hip fracture

Example 2. Sequence of conditions leading to death	
Part 1	
Disease condition that led directly to death	a) Pulmonary thrombo embolus
Intermediate cause of death	b) Deep leg vein thrombus
Underlying cause of death	c) Adenocarcinoma of the pancreas

Statement of the cause of death should be as specific as information allows.

### For Example

In recording a neoplasm, state the following:

- histopathological variety of the neoplasm
- where the neoplasm was
- if it was secondary, where the primary neoplasm was (even though it may have been removed).

### Joint causes of death

- Sometimes there are apparently two separate conditions leading to death.
- If there is no way of choosing between them, put them on the same line and explain that they were jointly responsible for death, using the words "combined effects of"

Example 3. Joint causes of death	
<b>Part 1</b>	
Immediate cause of death, also underlying cause of death	a) Ischaemic disease and chronic bronchitis <b>(joint causes of death)</b>

### Condition which led directly to death and no antecedents

- For some deaths there may be only one condition which led directly to death and no antecedents, for example diabetic ketoacidosis. If this is the case, you need to fill in only line 1 (a).
- If the person died because of injuries from some external cause, please give the external cause (such as a fall or a road traffic collision) as the underlying cause of death.

Example 4. External cause of death	
<b>Part 1</b>	
Immediate cause of death	a) Massive head trauma
Underlying cause of death	<b>b) Car collision</b>

- Do not use words which imply an intention or a circumstance like "suicide", or "murder". It is the responsibility of the legal authorities to give such information
- Include the external cause of death.

Example 5. Suicide, murder or accident	
<b>Part 1</b>	
Immediate cause of death	a) Compound fracture of skull
Underlying cause of death	<b>b) Gunshot wound</b>

- Statement describing any modes of dying, such as "cardiac failure" or "respiratory failure" which are nonspecific terms, should not be used.
- More specific terms relating to major organ failures, such as "congestive cardiac failure" or "arteriosclerotic renal failure", are acceptable as an immediate cause of death in line I (a).
- General terms such as "cachexia" should not be used at all on the death certificate.
- Do not use "old age" as the only cause of death in Part 1 unless the deceased was 80 or over and you cannot give a more specific cause of death.

#### Part II

- One or more conditions have contributed to death but are not part of the main sequence leading to death. You should not list all the conditions present at death in part II.

Example 6. Other conditions contributing to death	
<b>Part 1</b>	
Immediate cause of death	a) Intraperitoneal haemorrhage
Intermediate cause of death	b) Ruptured secondary deposit in liver
Underlying cause of death	c) Adenocarcinoma of the ascending colon
<b>Part 11</b>	
Other conditions contributing to death	d) <b>Diabetes mellitus</b>

#### Approximate interval/ Onset to death

- The time interval between initial insult and death.
- Maybe minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or even years between initial event and death.
- State the estimated time between each condition starting and the person dying. Useful for accurate compilation of statistics.

This section of the certificate should be completed.

Example 7. Time between each condition starting and person dying		
<b>Part 1</b>		<b>Time interval</b>
Immediate cause of death	a) Acute rupture of the septal myocardium	<b>Minutes</b>
Intermediate cause of death	b) Acute myocardial infarct	<b>6 days</b>
Intermediate cause of death	c) Thrombus of the coronary artery	<b>6 days</b>
Underlying cause of death	d) Arteriosclerotic coronary artery disease	<b>Years</b>
<b>Part 11</b>		
Other conditions contributing to death	Diabetes, Hypertensive cardiovascular disease	

#### DO NOT USE

- Cardiopulmonary arrest as a direct cause of death. Cardiopulmonary arrest is a mechanistic term ordinarily meaningless for purposes of death certification. It is a description of being dead, not a cause of death.
- Abbreviations such as "CVA", "RTA" or "PE" or medical symbols such as "#"
- Terms such as "cerebrovascular accident". Family may reason they imply violence
- The words "natural causes"

- If a certificate is issued prior to completion of histological or toxicological tests, the words "unascertained pending test results" may be used in line I (a). More detail may be requested later.

**Signature of doctor/ consultant's name.**

Certifier must attach his/ her signature over printed name (block capitals), medical qualifications and date of documentation on the certificate.