



Arkansas Department of Health

4815 West Markham Street • Little Rock, Arkansas 72205-3867 • Telephone (501) 661-2000
Governor Asa Hutchinson
Nathaniel Smith, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health

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Guidance for Certifying COVID-19 Deaths

The National Vital Statistics System (NCHS) is working on a formal guidance for certifiers, but in the meantime they have provided some basic information. **Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID-19** should be reported on the death certificate for all decedents where the disease caused or is assumed to have caused or contributed to death. Other terminology, e.g., SARS-CoV-2, can be used as long as it is clear that it indicates the 2019 coronavirus strain, but WHO’s standard terminology is preferred, e.g., COVID-19. Specification of the casual pathway 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. If the decedent had other chronic conditions such as COPD or asthma that may have contributed, these conditions can be reported in Part II. Here is an example:

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>

For more general guidance and training on cause-of-death reporting, certifiers can be referred to the Cause of Death mobile app available through <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/mobile-app.htm> and the Improving Cause of Death Reporting online training module, which can be found at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/improving_cause_of_death_reporting.htm.