



To: Vermont Funeral Directors

**Department of Health**

From: Dawn Anderson, EDRS Outreach and Training Coordinator

*Division of Health Surveillance*

Re: Changes to Death Reporting and the Electronic Death Registration System

Date: May 21, 2007

**October 2007: NOTE REVISIONS IN RED!**

I am writing to let you know about two important changes coming to death reporting in Vermont. Effective **Summer, 2008**, the Vermont Department of Health will begin to use a new death certificate based on the 2003 revision of the U.S. Standard Certificate of Death. At the same time, we will begin to roll-out Phase I of Vermont's Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS). The EDRS is a web-based application for reporting deaths and producing death certificates. Roll-out will continue in phases throughout 2008 and 2009, until most users are enrolled and active.

I have been hired by the Vital Records Unit of the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) to provide training and resources to assist you with these changes. In addition, I will be maintaining a web site containing updates on the process and helpful information about death reporting in Vermont. I welcome your questions and comments any time. Please contact me at [danders@vdh.state.vt.us](mailto:danders@vdh.state.vt.us) or 802-652-2070.

### **Changes to the Death Certificate**

The revised death certificate will include four new questions, and will include modifications to the presentation of some existing questions. Death certificates are a critical source of information for state, federal and even international public health programs. These changes were designed to elicit more specific data, which will in turn guide and enhance public health planning.

### **New Form and Process**

It is VDH's goal that eventually, most Vermont deaths will be fully reported on-line. However, we will continue to rely on a paper process in some instances. The paper process will be especially important as we make the transition to electronic reporting. The new paper process for death reporting will be very close to the current process of death reporting, with a few important differences.

With the start of the new **processes**, instead of using an actual death certificate for reporting, you will be using a form known as the Preliminary Report of Death. The Preliminary Report will contain all of the fields on a death certificate, and is organized so as to be user-friendly. Instead of registering deaths at the office of the town clerk, you will fax the completed Preliminary Report of Death to VDH Vital Records (VR), along with your request for certified copies of the death certificate. VR staff will enter the record into EDRS, register it, and notify the town clerk when the record is available for printing. The certificates will then be prepared by the town clerk and made available for your pick up. In addition, the Preliminary Report of Death will be the official document to use for obtaining the burial-transit and cremation permits.

**Prior to these changes**, we will distribute copies of the Preliminary Report, and will provide support and guidance as you transition to the new death certificate and reporting process.

## **Implementing a Vermont EDRS**

The Department of Health is building the EDRS application and will introduce the system in phases beginning in **Summer, 2008**. The first phase will primarily involve VDH Vital Records, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, and some key town clerks as users. Most funeral directors and physicians will continue to use the paper process during this first phase. The Department plans to make the system available to funeral directors and physicians **later in 2008**. When the EDRS is fully implemented, it will bring improvements to the death reporting process, as well as result in more accurate and timely information about deaths in Vermont.

As the application begins to take shape, the Department's EDRS staff will involve representatives of the various groups who participate in death reporting to test the application and related business practices. This includes funeral directors, physicians, town clerks, and certain public health programs that rely upon the information reported in death records.

## **Expected Benefits When EDRS is Fully Implemented**

Electronic Death Registration in Vermont will mean changes to some business processes. However, along with the changes will come a number of benefits. Among them:

- On-line collaboration among EDRS users, including funeral directors, physicians, medical examiners and town clerks
  - Eliminates the need to physically track down physicians to obtain signatures
  - Streamlines burial-transit permitting
- Support of electronic trade calls between funeral homes
- Provides for the completion and filing of a death record that is partially electronic and partially paper if all participants are not on-line
- Immediate SSN verification and fact of death reporting to the Social Security Administration
- Automatic identification of deaths to refer to the Medical Examiner (based on medical information provided by physicians)
- Built in edits will improve accuracy and consistency of death certificate data, including cause of death reporting, which will highlight areas of concern and aid in public health planning
- Will enhance opportunities to monitor infectious diseases and potential bioterrorism events as mortality data will be available to the Department of Health within five days of a death

*If you would like information about being a pilot test site for the EDRS, or to discuss any of the changes in death reporting, please feel free to contact me at [danders@vdh.state.vt.us](mailto:danders@vdh.state.vt.us) or 802.652.2070.*

## Additions and Changes Made to the Vermont Death Certificate in **Summer, 2008**

### New Questions

- ALIASES (*Any other names the decedent used or was known as*)
- EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? Yes No (From U.S. Standard Certificate of Death)
- \*VETERAN OF ANY WAR? Yes No
- \*IF SO, WHAT WAR?  
\*These questions exist on the current death certificate, but will be split into two questions on the new form. They are required to be asked by Vermont Statute and provide additional details about the career of someone who was in the armed forces
- DID DECEDENT RECEIVE HOSPICE CARE? (*In past 30 days*) Yes No Unknown
- VERMONT LICENSE NUMBER (funeral service licensee) (From U.S. Standard Certificate of Death)

### Revised Questions with Check Boxes for More Specific Responses

#### MARITAL STATUS AT TIME OF DEATH

- Married  Married, but separated  Civil Union  Widowed  
 Divorced  Civil Union dissolution  Never Married or in Civil Union

#### DECEDENT'S EDUCATION LEVEL

- 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less  Associate degree (e.g., AA, AS)  
 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade; no diploma  Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, AB, BS)  
 High school graduate or GED completed  Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)  
 Some college credit, but no degree  Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD) or  
Professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)

#### DECEDENT OF HISPANIC ORIGIN?

- No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latina/Latino  
 Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana/Chicano  
 Yes, Puerto Rican  Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latina/Latino  
 Yes, Cuban

#### DECEDENT'S RACE

- White  Asian Indian  Korean  Native Hawaiian  
 Black or African American  Chinese  Vietnamese  Guamanian or Chamorro  
 American Indian or Alaska Native  Filipino  Other Asian  Samoan  
 Japanese  Other Pacific Islander

#### PLACE OF DEATH

##### If Death Occurred In A Hospital

- Inpatient  Emergency Room/Outpatient  
 Dead on Arrival

##### If Death Occurred Somewhere Other Than A Hospital

- Nursing Home/Long Term Care Facility  
 Hospice Facility  Decedent's Home  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_