

Tips for Physicians Completing a Preliminary Report of Death

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1. Please print or type and do not use abbreviations

Whenever a death is reported using the paper method (Preliminary Report of Death) it will need to be faxed to Vital Records for entry into the Electronic Death Registration System prior to becoming a Death Certificate. Therefore it is critical that the information on these forms is clear and legible. If we can not read what you have written you will receive a call to confirm the contents before the report is processed and a certificate is produced for the family.

2. Address every question

Please avoid leaving fields blank as this leaves open to question whether the answer is unknown or just not addressed. If you do not know the required information “Unknown” is generally an acceptable answer (except for the Cause of Death Part I).

The exception to this rule is the Injury fields. These should be left blank for deaths that occurred in a “Natural” manner. If an injury was part of the cause of death the Medical Examiner should be contacted and he or she will complete the report.

If any of the following fields are left blank or are illegible, you will receive a call to confirm the contents before the report can be processed and a death certificate can be produced for the family.

- Manner of Death
- Cause of Death Part I
- Actual or Presumed Date of Death
- Actual or Presumed Time of Death -- (including indication of AM/PM)
- Date Pronounced Dead
- Time Pronounced Dead – (including indication of AM/PM)
- Signature of Certifier
- Date Certified
- Name of Certifier (printed)
- Address of Certifying Physician
- Title of Certifier

3. Be aware of cases that should go to the Medical Examiner

Any case where the *manner* of death is something other than “Natural” and any death involving an injury in the immediate or underlying cause should be referred to a Medical Examiner. The number for reporting a death to the Medical Examiner is 888-552-2952. This number has also been included on the Preliminary Report of Death form.

4. Take a few moments to review the Medical Examiner’s online Death Certificate tutorial.

This on line tutorial will walk you through the proper way to construct a cause of death statement and addresses some common challenges and errors that appear on certificates. It is available on the Vermont Department of Health’s web site (healthvermont.gov). On the main page select “Health Care Professionals”, then scroll to “Education and Training”, and select “Death Certificate Tutorial”, or go to http://healthvermont.gov/hc/death_certificate/tutorial.aspx.

5. Contact the Vermont Department of Health Vital Records Office by e-mail at EDRS@vdh.state.vt.us or by phone at 800-439-5008 if you have questions.

Additional information can also be found on the VDH Web site (healthvermont.gov). On the main page select “Health Care Professionals” and then go to “Education and Training”.