

THE VERMONT VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEM

Statewide vital registration began in Vermont in 1857, when the General Assembly passed a bill requiring that towns report all births, marriages, and deaths occurring in their jurisdiction to the Secretary of State. The legislature also required periodic publication of tables from the reports. This volume is the latest in a series of publications begun in 1857. Historically, the information contained on vital records has served as an important tool for public health officials and others by providing a picture of the general health of the population. Recognizing its importance, in 1896 the Legislature transferred responsibility for the vital statistics system to the newly formed Board of Health, the forerunner of the Vermont Department of Health. The Health Department has retained this responsibility to the present day.

The Vermont vital statistics system monitors the following vital events: births, deaths, marriages and civil unions, divorces and dissolutions, fetal deaths, and abortions. Each type of vital record follows a different path before being used to produce the statistics published here.

Births: When a birth occurs, the physician, midwife, or other birth attendant is required to complete a birth certificate and file it with the town clerk in the town of birth within 10 days. For hospital births, it is usually the medical records staff that completes the birth certificate. The completed birth certificate is recorded and filed in the town where the birth took place, and a certified copy is sent to the Health Department.

Deaths: Although a physician is responsible for filing the death certificate, the job may be, and often is, delegated to the funeral director. Most of the information needed to complete the death certificate is obtained from the family of the deceased. A physician, however, must complete the cause of death information and sign the death certificate. The funeral director files the completed certificate with the town clerk who sends a certified copy to the Health Department.

Marriages and civil unions: When a couple wishes to marry or establish a civil union in Vermont, they provide a town clerk with the information needed to complete the license. The couple takes the license to an officiant, who signs and dates it, and returns it to the town clerk. The town clerk records and files the certificate, and sends a certified copy to the Health Department.

Divorces and dissolutions: A divorce certificate or certificate dissolving a civil union is initiated by a lawyer or other individual handling the divorce or dissolution. The certificate is filed with the court as part of the divorce or dissolution proceedings. The court keeps the certificate until the decree becomes final, usually three months after the court hearing. When the decree is final, the court clerk signs the certificate and sends it to the Health Department for filing.

Fetal deaths and abortions: Reports of fetal death and induced termination of pregnancy (abortion) are sent directly to the Health Department by the physician, hospital, or clinic that performs the procedure. By law, these reports are for statistical purposes only, are not public records, and are destroyed after five years.

In addition to receiving copies of vital records from Vermont town clerks, the Health Department also receives copies of certificates of all Vermont resident births and deaths that occur in other states and in Canada. This allows the Department to do statistical analyses of vital events involving Vermont residents even if the birth or death occurred outside of the state. Health Department staff code and enter all vital records received into a computerized database. Records with unknown or unlikely data are corrected after querying the data provider. A data file containing statistical information from the records is sent to the National Center for Health Statistics to become part of a national database.