

DEATH CERTIFICATE ITEMS

Listed below are selected items on the revised death certificate. Some are revised and some are new.

Item 32. Time of Death

The time of the decedent's death is to be entered according to the 24-hour clock (Universal Time Clock). Midnight is considered the beginning of the day and should be entered as "0000", the end of the day is "2359"—there is no "2400". This can be important when determining the date of death.

32. TIME OF DEATH (24 hr.)

1749

Item 34a. License Number of Certifier

Your license number, as the certifier, must be entered on the certificate.

34a. LICENSE NUMBER (of Certifier)

Item 39. Probable Manner of Death

Always indicate the manner of death. Most cases certified by a physician other than the medical examiner are classified as a natural death.

39. PROBABLE MANNER OF DEATH

Natural

Deaths in which an accident, suicide or homicide has occurred, or those classified as Pending Investigation or Undetermined, come under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner.

The following are under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner:

Accident Suicide Homicide Pending Investigation Undetermined

Item 43 a-b, If Surgery Mentioned & Date of Surgery

Enter the condition for which surgery was performed, followed by the date of the surgery.

43a. IF SURGERY MENTIONED IN PART I OR II, ENTER REASON FOR SURGERY

43b. DATE OF SURGERY (Mo., Day, Yr.)

Item 44. Did Tobacco Use Contribute to Death?

Use of tobacco as it relates to cause of death has become an important public health issue and has been added to assist in obtaining quality data.

44. DID TOBACCO USE CONTRIBUTE TO DEATH?

Yes No Probably Unknown

Item 52a-b. If Transportation Injury, Status of Decedent, Type of Vehicle

Detailed traffic accident information is necessary when coding the cause of death. This question normally comes under the medical examiner's jurisdiction since the cause of death would be from external causes (s. 406.11, F.S.).

IF TRANSPORTATION INJURY, 52a. Status of Decedent

Driver/Operator Passenger Pedestrian Other (Specify)

52b. Type of Vehicle Car/Minivan S.U.V. Motorcycle

Pickup Truck/Cargo Van Bus Heavy Transport Other (Specify)

Questions?

Telephone (904) 359-6900
Quality Assurance

State Office of Vital Statistics

Post Office Box 210

Jacksonville, Florida

32231-0042

www.doh.state.fl.us

DH Form # 150-849

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What the Physician Should Know about Certifying Cause of Death on the FLORIDA DEATH CERTIFICATE



OR...How to Get
YOUR Diagnosis on OUR Form

WHY IS THE DEATH CERTIFICATE SO IMPORTANT?

Families cannot proceed with business without a completed death certificate. It is needed for:

- Probating estates
- Insurance claims
- Social security
- Veterans' benefits
- Retirement benefits

Public Health

- Monitor the leading Causes of Death
- Unintentional injury, suicide & homicide related deaths
- Infant deaths
- Occupational related deaths

WHO SHOULD SIGN THE CERTIFICATE? (s. 382.008(3), F.S.)

Was this your patient, were you the attending physician, were you prescribing medication for an ongoing illness or condition, were you covering for an out of town colleague? If so, you are the best person to complete the medical certification of death.

Florida Statute states the certificate must be signed by the physician in charge of the decedent's care for the illness or condition, which resulted in death, or the physician in attendance at the time of death or immediately after death.

It also states, "...The physician or medical examiner shall certify over his or her signature the cause of death to the best of his or her knowledge and belief..."

Cause of Death can be amended by the certifying physician, the attending physician (if different from certifier and listed on certificate) or the medical examiner at any time should additional information become available.

HOW DO I ENTER INFORMATION FOR CAUSE OF DEATH?

Line a should have the **Immediate cause**; mode of dying, such as cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest is insufficient information and should only be used when followed by conditions such as arrhythmia due to ischemic cardiac disease.

Line b should indicate the **condition** that gave rise to the immediate cause, e.g. renal failure (line a) due to diabetes (line b) or myocardial infarction (line a) due to coronary artery disease (line b).

Underlying cause should be listed last.

Enter best estimate of the **interval** between presumed onset and the date of death. General terms such as minutes, hours or days are acceptable; terms such as "unknown" or "approximately" may be used.

WHAT IF I'M NOT SURE ABOUT THE FINAL CAUSE OF DEATH?

Cause of death should be recorded based on your best medical opinion. Terms such as "probable", "possible", etc. can be used when the certifier is not comfortable with an exact diagnosis. All significant conditions can then be listed as necessary.

WHAT MUST BE REPORTED TO MEDICAL EXAMINER?

Section 406.11, Florida Statutes outlines those circumstances of death that fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner and must be reported to him/her:

- Criminal violence
- Accident, suicide, homicide
- Poison
- In police custody, in prison or penal institution
- Suddenly, when in apparent good health
- Criminal abortion
- Unattended by physician

- Any suspicious or unusual circumstance
- By disease constituting a threat to public health
- Disease, injury, or toxic agent resulting from employment.

WHAT IF THE PATIENT DIES AT HOME?

The patient died at home, not in a facility. I am not comfortable signing the death certificate since I was not there.

Once the medical examiner, as the local authority, has investigated the case and determined there were no circumstances that would place the case under their jurisdiction, then it falls to the attending physician to certify cause of death. Again, terms such as possible, probable, etc. can be used if the certifier is not comfortable with an absolute.

If the death does *not* fall under the medical examiner's jurisdiction, only the family can request a private autopsy.

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO COMPLETE THE CAUSE OF DEATH?

Florida statute requires the funeral director to provide the certifier with the death certificate to certify the cause of death, and to file the record with the county of death. It mandates a timeframe in which the funeral director is required to work—the record must be filed within 5 calendar days of death, with a possible extension of 5 business days. Within that timeframe, once the physician receives the record, he/she has **72 hours** to complete the medical certification and make it available to the funeral director (s. 382.008(3), F.S.).

RESPONSIBILITY FOR MEDICAL INFORMATION

In order for a record to be accepted for filing, certain medical items must be completed. The physician's signature on the record indicates concurrence that all medically related information provided is accurate and true, to the best of their knowledge. The physician and funeral director must work together to ensure a complete and accurate record is filed.