



Ministry of Health
Directorate General for Disease Surveillance and Control



Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19

Version (1) DGDSC 8th July 2020



Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19

Introduction:

The exceptional challenge posed to society and the health service around relating the mortalities to COVID-19 and its impact on care for the deceased and their families has necessitated looking into this aspect as part of the response to the pandemic. All participants in the system must be ever conscious of this and conduct themselves in a manner that does not add to the work burden, the spread of disease, and/or the emotional suffering of families. Prompt and accurate certification of death due to COVID19 remains also a critical measure of ongoing public health surveillance and response. This guideline is issued to provide a framework to death certifier during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose:

- To define the COVID-19 related deaths
- To provide guidance on certifying deceased with suspected and confirmed SARS-COV2 infection
- To provide the guidance on testing for the COVID-19 in those brought in dead

Definition for Deaths Due to COVID-19:

- Death due to COVID-19 as per WHO guidelines is defined as: death resulting from a clinically compatible illness (symptoms, laboratory and radiologically), in a probable or confirmed COVID-19 case, unless there is a clear alternative cause of death that cannot be related to COVID disease (e.g. trauma, terminal illness).
- There should be no period of complete recovery from COVID-19 between illness and death.
- When reporting COVID-19 as a cause of death, use standard WHO terminology, such as “Coronavirus Disease 2019” or “COVID-19”
- COVID-19 should not be reported on the death certificate if it did not cause or contribute to death.



Ministry of Health
Directorate General for Disease Surveillance and Control

- The timely and efficient verification of death is highly important in the current crisis and those responsible should act accordingly.

General definition:

- **Responsible staff:** A doctor who attended the deceased during their last illness has the responsibility to complete the death certificate
- **The underlying cause of death:** is the disease or injury, which initiated the train of morbid events, leading directly to death. For example, a patient died due to acute respiratory distress syndrome which is the direct cause of death which was due to pneumonia caused by COVID-19 which is the underlying cause of death. See examples in figure 1
- **Recovery from COVID-19 infection:** clinical improvement including no fever for more than 2 days and minimal of 14 days from date of the onset of the COVID-19 symptoms.
- **Brought in Dead:** a person found already clinically dead upon arrival to a healthcare facility or upon arrival of professional medical assistance, for example, home, road, beach, place of work.

COVID-19 related death examples:

- A healthy person presents to the health care facility with clinically and radiologically picture fit with the diagnosis of COVID-19 and the SARS-COV2 test came positive. Then Deteriorated and died
- A comorbid including DNR patient present with clinical and radiological picture fit with a diagnosis of COVID-19 and confirm by the SARS-COV2 test. Then deteriorated and died as a consequence of COVID-19.
- A comorbid including DNR patient or a healthy patient was admitted to the health care facility due to other diseases (hypertension, diabetes, burn, etc.), but he/she acquired COVID 19 infection (hospital-acquired infection-HAI). Then deteriorated and died as a consequence of COVID-19.



Ministry of Health
Directorate General for Disease Surveillance and Control

- Brought in Dead:
 - The deceased was diagnosed with COVID-19 (confirmed by SARS-COV2 test) and died within 14 days of initial illness or later due to complications with no period of recovery.
 - The deceased was a probable case (as per the COVID-19 case definition) and the test came positive (SARS-COV2 PCR).
 - There were symptoms with an epidemiological link suggestive of COVID-19 disease.
 - No clear cause of death

Non-COVID-19 related death examples:

- Patient with comorbid died due to his/her primary disease even if SARS-COV2 was positive (e.g.: diabetic patient died with DKA, intracranial hemorrhage in uncontrolled hypertension)
- Patient is labeled with DNR died due to his/her primary disease even if SARS-COV2 was positive (cardiac arrest in a patient with severe cardiomyopathy)
- Brought in dead with a clear cause of death and no history supporting the diagnosis of COVID-19, (Example: Trauma MVC/RTA, burn, drowning, suicide, substance overdose) see example figure 2

COVID-19 test should not be ordered in the following circumstances:

- For Non-COVID -19 related death as described above if not already done
- Based on the request of the family, Embassies, or any other party involved if clinical picture is not fitting the diagnosis.*
 - *The family, sponsor, embassy who is requesting the test if insisting on it can be offered it if they take the cost of the test.



Ministry of Health
Directorate General for Disease Surveillance and Control

Frame A: Medical data: Part 1 and 2				
1 Report disease or condition directly leading to death on line a Report chain of events in due to order (if applicable) State the underlying cause on the lowest used line		Cause of death	Time interval from onset to death	
		a	Acute respiratory distress syndrome	2 days
		b	Due to: Pneumonia	10 days
		c	Due to: COVID-19	10 days
2 Other significant conditions contributing to death (time intervals can be included in brackets after the condition)		Cerebral palsy [10 Years]		
Manner of death:				
<input type="checkbox"/> Disease	<input type="checkbox"/> Assault	<input type="checkbox"/> Could not be determined		
<input type="checkbox"/> Accident	<input type="checkbox"/> Legal intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Pending investigation		
<input type="checkbox"/> Intentional self harm	<input type="checkbox"/> War	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown		

Note: This is a typical course with a certificate that has been filled in correctly. COVID-19 cases may have comorbidity. **The comorbidity is recorded in Part 2.**

Figure 1 Death due to COVID-19 (adapted from International Guidelines for Certification and Classification (Coding) Of Covid-19 as Cause of Death)

Frame A: Medical data: Part 1 and 2				
1 Report disease or condition directly leading to death on line a Report chain of events in due to order (if applicable) State the underlying cause on the lowest used line		Cause of death	Time interval from onset to death	
		a	Hypovolaemic shock	1 day
		b	Due to: Aortic dissection	1 day
		c	Due to: Motor vehicle accident	2 days
		d	Due to: COVID-19	
2 Other significant conditions contributing to death (time intervals can be included in brackets after the condition)		Underlying cause of death		
Manner of death:				
<input type="checkbox"/> Disease	<input type="checkbox"/> Assault	<input type="checkbox"/> Could not be determined		
<input type="checkbox"/> Accident	<input type="checkbox"/> Legal intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Pending investigation		
<input type="checkbox"/> Intentional self harm	<input type="checkbox"/> War	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown		

Note: Persons with COVID-19 may die of other diseases or accidents, such cases are not deaths due to COVID-19 and should not be certified as such. In case you think that COVID-19 aggravated the consequences of the accident, you may report COVID-19 in Part 2. Please remember to indicate the manner of death and record in part 1 the exact kind of an incident or other external cause.

Figure 2 Death due to Not COVID-19 (adapted from International Guidelines for Certification and Classification (Coding) Of Covid-19 as Cause of Death)



Ministry of Health
Directorate General for Disease Surveillance and Control

Reference:

1. International Guidelines for Certification and Classification (Coding) Of Covid-19 as Cause of Death. https://www.who.int/classifications/icd/Guidelines_Cause_of_Death_COVID-19
2. Guidance for Certifying Deaths Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/vsrg/vsrg03-508>
3. Guidance for doctors completing Medical Certificates of Cause of Death in England and Wales. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government>