

# Medical certification of cause of death



## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

This guide contains basic information about how to correctly complete the **International Form of Medical Certificate of Cause of Death**, as recommended by the World Health Organization.

While your medical certificate may look slightly different to the examples provided here, if it follows international standards, it should contain the same elements as contained in Frame A (Parts 1 and 2).

### PART 1

**Part 1** of the certificate is where you write the **chain of events leading to death**, starting from the immediate or direct cause and working backwards to the underlying cause of death.

**The underlying cause of death is the disease or injury that started the chain of events leading directly to death or the circumstances of the accident or violence that produced the fatal injury.**

As many deaths are due to a chain of different diseases or morbid conditions, the underlying cause of death should be written on the **lowest used line** in Part 1 (see examples on back page).

### PART 2

**Part 2** of the certificate is where you write all **other significant diseases, conditions or injuries** that contributed to death but that did not result in the underlying cause of death given in Part 1.



What doctors certify as the underlying cause of death is coded and consolidated into national statistics.

These are used by governments to determine public health priorities and evaluate the impact of health programs.

It is important that this information on the leading causes of death is accurate.

Frame A: Medical data: Part 1 and 2			
1		Cause of death	Time interval from onset to death
Report disease or condition directly leading to death on line a	a		
Report chain of events in due order (if applicable)	b	Due to:	
	c	Due to:	
State the underlying cause on the lowest used line	d	Due to:	
2	Other significant conditions contributing to death (time intervals can be included in brackets after the condition)		

Time interval from onset to death

### TIME

The column on the right-hand side of the death certificate is for recording the **approximate time interval between onset of the condition and date of death**.

The time interval should be written for **all conditions**, especially those in Part 1.

Time periods can be minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or years.

## Important points when completing a death certificate:

- Complete each item in order following any specific instructions given in your country
  - Always use consecutive lines starting at 1(a), never leave blank lines within the chain of events
  - If there is only one cause of death, it is entered at line 1(a)
  - Each condition below line 1(a) is a cause of the condition above it
  - The initiating cause in the chain of events leading to death is the underlying cause of death
- Your entries must be legible
  - Use black ink
  - Do not make alterations or erasures or use correction fluid. If you need to delete an entry, draw a single line through it
  - Do not use abbreviations
  - Only write one cause per line

### Case study one

A 60-year old hypertensive patient was admitted to the surgical casualty ward with severe abdominal pain and vomiting, which had lasted for one week. She was diagnosed as having a strangulated femoral hernia with a bowel perforation. She underwent surgery to release the hernia and resect the intestine, with an end-to-end anastomosis. Two days after surgery she developed signs of peritonitis and died.

In this example, the underlying cause of death is strangulated femoral hernia. Hypertension, which is not in the chain of events leading to death but would have contributed to the death, is recorded in Part 2.

Frame A: Medical data: Part 1 and 2			
<b>1</b>		Cause of death	Time interval from onset to death
Report disease or condition directly leading to death on line a		a <i>Peritonitis</i>	<i>2 days</i>
Report chain of events in due order (if applicable)		b Due to: <i>Bowel perforation</i>	<i>1 week</i>
		c Due to: <i>Strangulated femoral hernia</i>	<i>1 week</i>
State the underlying cause on the lowest used line		d Due to:	
<b>2</b>		<i>Hypertension (unknown)</i>	
Other significant conditions contributing to death (time intervals can be included in brackets after the condition)			

### Case study two

A 23-year old man dies from traumatic shock one hour after sustaining multiple fractures when he was hit by a truck. The accident happened five hours ago.

In this example, there are three events in the chain leading to death, and these are written on lines 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c). The underlying cause of death (pedestrian hit by truck) is recorded on the lowest line used in Part 1, in this case, line 1(c). Remember, in deaths due to accident and violence, the underlying cause of death is the circumstances of the accident or violence, NOT the injury.

Frame A: Medical data: Part 1 and 2			
<b>1</b>		Cause of death	Time interval from onset to death
Report disease or condition directly leading to death on line a		a <i>Traumatic shock</i>	<i>1 hour</i>
Report chain of events in due order (if applicable)		b Due to: <i>Multiple fractures</i>	<i>5 hours</i>
		c Due to: <i>Pedestrian hit by truck</i>	<i>5 hours</i>
State the underlying cause on the lowest used line		d Due to:	
<b>2</b>			
Other significant conditions contributing to death (time intervals can be included in brackets after the condition)			