DEATH CERTIFICATE ITEMS
Listed below are selected items on the revised death record. Some are revised and some are new.

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.

| TIME OF DEATH (24 hr.) | 1749 |

License Number of Certifier
Your license number, as the certifier, must be entered on the record.

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.

- 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.

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.).

- Driver/Operator
- Passenger
- Pedestrian
- Other (Specify)

Type of Vehicle
- Car/Minivan
- S.U.V.
- Motorcycle
- Pickup Truck/Cargo Van
- Bus
- Heavy Transport
- Other (Specify)

Questions?
Telephone (904) 359-6900
Ext. 9020

Bureau of Vital Statistics
Post Office Box 210
Jacksonville, Florida
32231-0042

DH Form # 150-849
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 record must be signed by the decedent’s primary or attending physician who treated the decedent through examination, medical advice, or medication during the 12 months preceding the date of 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 the record) or the medical examiner at any time should additional information become available. This is done by a medical amendment.

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
- Sudden, 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 record 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.