

COVID-19 Alert No. 9

April 15, 2021

Reminder: COVID-19 Certification Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Page on the NVSS COVID-19 Website

In April 2020, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) released *Guidance for Certifying Deaths Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)* available at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/vsrg/vsrg03-508.pdf>. NCHS also provided answers to FAQs from certifiers about how to report deaths due to COVID-19 on death certificates, among other related topics, which can be accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/faq.htm>. The page has four main sections: How NCHS Collects and Reports Data on Deaths Due to COVID-19, Surveillance of Deaths Due to COVID-19, Coding Deaths Due to COVID-19, and Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19.

Certifiers should only report conditions that they determine *caused* or *contributed* to death. If the certifier determines COVID-19 is a cause of death, then they should report it on the death certificate. If the certifier determines COVID-19 did *not* cause or contribute to death, then they should *not* report it on the death certificate.

Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19 Vaccines on Death Certificates

Like all other causes of death, if the certifier determines that a condition is a cause of death, then they should report it on the death certificate. Like any vaccine, if a certifier determines that a COVID-19 vaccine *caused* or *contributed* to death, then they should report it on the death certificate, along with any complications it caused to specify how the vaccine caused death. For example, if the certifier determines a COVID-19 vaccine was the underlying cause of death, then "adverse effects of COVID-19 vaccine" or other similar language should be reported on the lowest line used in Part I with the specific adverse effects on the lines above in a logical sequence. An example of a cause-of-death statement could be "anaphylaxis" on line a. and "allergic reaction to COVID-19 vaccine" on line b.

It is the certifier's responsibility to determine whether there was a *causal* relationship between any medical condition or medical care, such as a vaccine, and the death. A temporal relationship between a vaccination and death is a necessary but not sufficient condition to indicate a causal relationship. Certifiers should not report medical conditions as *causes* of death on the death certificate based on only a temporal relationship.

As always, personally identifiable information, such as individual names, as well as organization names, including brand names, should *not* be reported in cause-of-death fields. This guidance is consistent with current procedures for cause-of-death reporting.

Steven Schwartz, PhD

Director – Division of Vital Statistics
National Center for Health Statistics

[3311 Toledo Rd | Hyattsville, MD 20782](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs)