

Medical certification of cause of death



Bloomberg Philanthropies DATA FOR HEALTH INITIATIVE

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

This guide contains 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).



The diagnoses recorded in death certificates are coded and used in national mortality statistics.

This determines public health priorities and interventions.

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.

Start at line 1(a), with the immediate (direct) cause, then go back in time to record preceding conditions on succeeding lines until you get to the one that started the sequence of events.

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

Do not record the **mode of dying**, such as cardiac arrest, respiratory failure or heart failure. Try to be as specific as you can.

Frame A: Medical data: Part 1 and 2

1 Report disease or condition directly leading to death on line a

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:	
	d Due to:	
State the underlying cause on the lowest used line		
2	Other significant conditions contributing to death (time intervals can be included in brackets after the condition)	

PART 2

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

2 Other significant conditions contributing 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 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.

Time interval from onset to death

Important points when completing a death certificate:

- Complete each item in order following any specific instructions given in your country
- Your entries must be legible
- Use black or dark 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

- 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 underlyingly cause of death

Case study one

A 64-year-old person is admitted to the hospital with a history of loss of consciousness for one day and dies on the same day. His condition is diagnosed as cerebral haemorrhage due to secondary hypertension of 4 years duration due to chronic pyelonephritis of 10 years duration. The chronic pyelonephritis had been caused by obstruction due to prostatic adenoma which arose 15 years ago. The patient has had diabetes mellitus type 2 for unknown duration.

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 <i>Cerebral heamorrhage</i>	<i>1 day</i>
Report chain of events in due order (if applicable)		b Due to: <i>Secondary hypertension</i>	<i>4 years</i>
		c Due to: <i>Chronic pyelonephritis</i>	<i>10 years</i>
		d Due to: <i>Prostatic adenoma</i>	<i>15 years</i>
State the underlying cause on the lowest used line			
2	Other significant conditions contributing to death (time intervals can be included in brackets after the condition)		
	<i>Diabetes mellitus type 2 (unknown)</i>		

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 circumstance of the accident or violence, NOT the injury.

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 <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>
		d Due to:	
State the underlying cause on the lowest used line			
2	Other significant conditions contributing to death (time intervals can be included in brackets after the condition)		