



# Health Alert Network Message 20-26: Updated Guidance on Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19

**Origination Date:**  
*April 22, 2020*

**Revision Dates (list all revision dates):**

## **Updated Guidance for Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19**

Update: March 12, 2020; Updated: March 13, 2020; Last Updated: April 22, 2020

This guidance is to provide death certifiers on proper cause-of-death certification for cases where confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection caused or contributed to the death. As clinical guidance on COVID-19 evolves, this guidance may be updated. Please share this information with anyone who helps to create, review, and certify death certificates.

### **Notification of Coroner:**

**All deaths from a virulent contagious disease, including COVID-19, must be reported to the Coroner of jurisdiction.**

### **Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19:**

If COVID-19 caused or is suspected to have caused or contributed to a death, this should be reported on the death record for the decedent. Louisiana requests that all cause-of-death statements use the standard terminology **COVID-19**. Listing all other causes leading to the death is also important.

When determining whether COVID-19 played a role in the cause of death, conclusive positive laboratory testing should be conducted and used whenever possible. COVID-19 should not be listed on a death record when there is a conclusive negative COVID-19 laboratory result.

If COVID-19 is suspected to have caused or contributed to the death and no laboratory testing has been conducted, postmortem COVID-19 laboratory testing is highly encouraged. For more information regarding postmortem COVID-19 laboratory testing, please refer to [Health Alert Message 20-23](#): Electronic Lab Forms and Updated COVID-19 Guidance for OPH State Lab. If you need further information or have questions about testing supplies, email [covid.epi@la.gov](mailto:covid.epi@la.gov)

In rare cases where a definitive diagnosis of COVID-19 cannot be made by laboratory testing, but it is suspected or likely, it is acceptable to report COVID-19 on a death record as "Probable" or

“Presumed.” In these instances, medical certifiers should use their best clinical judgment in determining if a COVID-19 infection was likely.

**Cause-of-Death Reporting:**

In cases where COVID-19 causes pneumonia and fatal respiratory distress, both pneumonia and respiratory distress should be included along with COVID-19 in Part I. Certifiers should include as much detail as possible based on their knowledge of the case, medical records, laboratory testing, etc. If the decedent had other chronic conditions such as COPD or asthma that may have also contributed, these conditions can be reported in Part II. Below is an example:

CAUSE OF DEATH (See instructions and examples)		Approximate interval: Onset to death
<p>32. <b>PART I.</b> Enter the <u>chain of events</u>—diseases, injuries, or complications—that directly caused the death. DO NOT enter terminal events such as cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, or ventricular fibrillation without showing the etiology. DO NOT ABBREVIATE. Enter only one cause on a line. Add additional lines if necessary.</p> <p>IMMEDIATE CAUSE (Final disease or condition resulting in death) → a. <u>Acute respiratory distress syndrome</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):</p> <p>Sequentially list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed on line a. Enter the <b>UNDERLYING CAUSE</b> (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death) <b>LAST</b></p> <p>b. <u>Pneumonia</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):</p> <p>c. <u>COVID-19</u> Due to (or as a consequence of):</p> <p>d. _____</p>		<p>2 days</p> <p>10 days</p> <p>10 days</p>
<p><b>PART II.</b> Enter other <u>significant conditions contributing to death</u> but not resulting in the underlying cause given in PART I.</p>		<p>33. WAS AN AUTOPSY PERFORMED? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>35. DID TOBACCO USE CONTRIBUTE TO DEATH? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Probably <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown</p>		<p>34. WERE AUTOPSY FINDINGS AVAILABLE TO COMPLETE THE CAUSE OF DEATH? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>36. IF FEMALE: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant within past year <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant at time of death <input type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant, but pregnant within 42 days of death <input type="checkbox"/> Not pregnant, but pregnant 43 days to 1 year before death <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown if pregnant within the past year</p>		<p>37. MANNER OF DEATH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Homicide <input type="checkbox"/> Accident <input type="checkbox"/> Pending investigation <input type="checkbox"/> Suicide <input type="checkbox"/> Could not be determined</p>

**Cause-of-Death Resources:**

For more general guidance and training on cause-of-death reporting, certifiers can refer to the Cause of Death mobile app available through <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/mobile-app.htm> and the Improving Cause of Death Reporting online training module, which can be found at [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/improving\\_cause\\_of\\_death\\_reporting.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/improving_cause_of_death_reporting.htm).

If you have any questions regarding COVID-19 as it pertains to **death records**, please contact the Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics at For the most recent updates regarding COVID-19, please visit our website at [www.ldh.la.gov/coronavirus](http://www.ldh.la.gov/coronavirus).

**References:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vital Statistics Reporting Guidance. Guidance for Certifying Deaths Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/vsrg/vsrg03-508.pdf>