

Certifying External Causes of Death

General

- When a death results from causes other than natural, the Injury page in OVERS (items 55-61 on the paper form) should always be completed.
- Falls, overdoses, and medication toxicity are considered to be external causes; therefore, the Injury page in OVERS (items 55-60 on the paper form) must be completed.

Adverse Reaction to Prescribed Medication

- Specify the condition that necessitated the medication and complete the Injury page in OVERS (items 55-60 on the paper form), noting the name of the medication.

Poisoning and Drug Overdoses

- Specify the type or name of the drug(s), medication(s) or other substance(s). If unknown, state "unknown drugs."

Aspiration and Inhalation

- If the aspiration was due to a disease condition, specify the condition. If not, complete the Injury page in OVERS (items 55-60 on the paper form).
- Specify if aspiration involved gastric contents, food, foreign body, etc.

Enter the details in the Describe injury occurred field in OVERS (item 60 on the paper form).

Fall

- State how the fall occurred.
- Specify if the fall involved a bed or other furniture, stairs, ladder, tree, wheelchair, ice, snow, ice-skates, roller skates, playground equipment, etc.
- If the fall occurred while the decedent was being carried by, or supported by, other persons, be certain to note this on the death certificate.
- If none of the above apply, specify if the fall resulted from slipping or tripping on the same level.

Aircraft Accident

- Specify the type of aircraft (helicopter, ultralight, glider, private fixed-wing, commercial fixed-wing, hang glider, etc.).

For more information, visit:
<https://bit.ly/orvrMEDCERT>

Fire

- Specify the origin of the fire (cigarette, stove, candle, fireplace, electrical short, ignition of flammable liquid, etc.).
- If the fire was caused by an explosion, specify the source of the explosion (gasoline, bomb, grain dust, etc.).
- Specify whether the fire was located in a private dwelling, other building or structure, or other locations.
- Note whether the death resulted from ignition or melting of nightwear or other clothing and apparel.

Gun-related Deaths

- Specify the type of weapon involved (e.g., handgun, rifle, shotgun, etc.).

Drowning

- If the drowning did not involve a boat, specify where the drowning occurred (e.g., bathtub, swimming pool, lake, etc.) and whether or not the drowning occurred as a result of a fall into the body of water or whether the decedent was already in the water (e.g., bathing, swimming).
- If a boat was involved, specify the type of boat (e.g., merchant ship, passenger ship, fishing boat, sailboat, canoe, kayak, inflatable craft, jet skis, etc.) and where the drowning occurred.
- For watercraft that can be either powered or unpowered, note which was involved in the death.

Neglect, Abandonment, or Maltreatment

- Specify if the maltreatment was by a spouse, parent, acquaintance, official authorities, etc.

Legal Intervention

- If death resulted from the actions of a law enforcement agent, whether intentionally or unintentionally, note that a law enforcement officer was involved and select "Homicide" in the Manner of Death field on the Other Factors page in OVERS (item 52 on the paper form).

Why is Cause of Death Information Important?

Cause of death data is important for public health surveillance, medical research, design of interventions, and funding decisions for research and development. Information from the death certificate is used by state and local health jurisdictions, university researchers, non-profit organizations, private foundations, other state agencies, and the federal government for health assessment, disease and injury prevention, health promotion, population estimates, and child death review activities.