

INFORMATION FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS

The death certificate is an important legal document as well as a valuable family record for medical and genealogical purposes. It also provides valuable information for public health and research studies.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS:

[Idaho Code §39-260](#), referring to Registration of Deaths, is printed in its entirety on the reverse side of the death certificate form. The provisions you need to be concerned with as far as the medical section of the death certificate are excerpted or paraphrased below (*with emphasis added*).

Signatures required: Unless electronically filed, all signatures required must be entered in dark, unfading ink. No stamps or other types of facsimile signatures may be used.

Who should sign? The funeral director is responsible for determining who the legal certifier of the record must be and obtaining the signature on the death certificates.

[Idaho Code §39-260.1\(b\)](#) Except as otherwise provided, **medical data shall be supplied by the physician, physician assistant or advanced practice professional nurse who attended the deceased during the last illness**, who shall certify to the cause of death according to his/her best knowledge, information and belief within seventy-two (72) hours from time of death.

Should an associate physician sign in the absence of the attending physician?

Please note there are **three** restrictions in the law that the associate physician must meet in order to qualify.

[Idaho Code §39-260.1\(b\)](#) In the absence of the attending physician, physician assistant or advanced practical professional nurse or with said persons approval the certificate may be completed and signed by said persons associate, who must be a physician, physician assistant or advanced practice professional nurse, the chief medical officer of the institution in which death occurred, or the physician who performed an autopsy upon the decedent, **provided such individual ¹ has access to the medical history of the case, ² views the deceased at or after death, and ³ death is due to natural causes.** (*Emphasis and numbering added.*)

Coroner Cases: Be alert to identify cases which require a coroner's certification. [Idaho Code §39-260.2](#) states in part, "**The person in charge of interment or of removal** of the body from the district **shall refer the following cases to the coroner** who shall make an immediate investigation, supply the necessary medical data, and certify to the cause of death:

- (a) *When no physician, physician assistant or advanced practice professional nurse was in attendance during the last illness of the deceased; or*
- (b) *When the circumstances suggest that the death occurred as a result of other than "natural causes."*
- (c) *When death is due to natural cause and the physician, physician assistant or advanced practice professional nurse who attended the deceased during the last illness or said person's designated associate who must be a physician, physician assistant or advanced practice professional nurse, is not available or is physically incapable of signing.*

Anytime the initiating event in a final sequence of causes can be traced back to an external event, the coroner must sign as certifier. This applies to late effects of injuries; also, as there is no time limit mentioned in the law. If a later complication arises from an injury or in an injury results in a chronic condition which in turn leads to death, then the death is classified to the initial event, which was the injury. Also, some surgeries are to correct conditions resulting from an injury, so it may be necessary for you to determine the reason for the surgery in order to determine who the proper certifier should be. (See the sheet of instructions entitled CORONER REFERRALS for conditions and "buzz words" that probably require further investigation as to whether the coroner must sign.)

Since the funeral director is required by law to determine who the certifier should be, the physicians should cooperate with you in responding to relevant questions. If you experience problems in this regard, please notify one of our field representatives.

Completeness: No certificates shall be deemed complete until every item of information required has been provided or its omission satisfactorily accounted for.