



Reporting COVID-19 as Cause of Death

Cause of death documentation and statistical reporting of COVID-19 deaths.

Surveillance of mortality data provides important information about how disease progression occurs at the population level¹. Analysis of this data can provide important guidance on the development of public health interventions and evaluation of their impact, especially during pandemics like the COVID-19 outbreak¹. One of the most important methods of mortality surveillance is cause of death (COD) listed on death certificates. In order to accurately understand the impact of COVID-19 it is important that death certificate data not only be accurate, but that the method of data collection is understood prior to analyzing data.

In the state of California, COD is determined by either a licensed physician or coroner using as much relevant information as they can access. This can include the deceased's medical history, medical records, laboratory tests, and autopsy reports¹. Once this information has been reviewed they use their informed medical opinion to complete two sections of the death certificate, section 107 and section 112 (Fig.1). Section 107 is titled "Cause of Death", and section 112 is titled "Other Significant Conditions Contributing to Death but Not Resulting in the Underlying Cause Given in 107".

Section 107 documents COD as both the "Immediate Cause" and "Underlying Cause" of death. This allows for tracking not just the COD, but also the sequence of conditions that ultimately resulted in death¹. The immediate cause of death is the disease that immediately preceded death and is listed first in section 107. In the example of COVID-19 infections, the immediate cause of death would not be COVID-19 but more likely a disease like acute respiratory distress syndrome. After listing the immediate cause of death the physician or coroner is required to list other illnesses that led to the immediate cause of death in a logical order through which they progressed. For COVID-19, these could include other illnesses like pneumonia. The final illness listed is the underlying cause of death, which is the "disease or injury which initiated the train of morbid events leading directly to death"¹. In this example, COVID-19 would be listed as the underlying cause of death.

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What Counts as a COVID-19 Death?

A death is counted as a COVID-19 related death when COVID-19 is listed anywhere in section 107, as either the cause of death or a contributing cause of death.

COVID -19 ICD 10 Code:
U07.1



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Section 112 is completed next, and allows the physician or coroner to document other medical conditions the deceased had at the time of death that may have increased the risk of complications or death, but did not directly contribute to the cause of death. For COVID-19, conditions listed in section 112 could include diseases like diabetes, chronic lung disease, or chronic kidney disease¹. Although these diseases are not COD, it is important to document any illness that may have caused complications or increased the risk of death.

Figure 1. Example of Section 107 and Section 112 on a death certificate, using COVID-19 as an example.

Box 107: Cause of Death	Duration
A) Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome	2 Days
(Due to)	
B) Pneumonia	10 Days
(Due to)	
C) COVID-19	10 Days
(Due to)	
D)	
Box 112: Other Significant Conditions Contributing to Death, But Not Resulting in the Underlying Cause Given in 107 History of COPD	

Sections of the Death Certificate:

Section 107 Cause of Death:

- Immediate cause of death
- Other illnesses contributing to death
- Underlying cause of death

Section 112 Other Significant Conditions Contributing to Death, but Not Resulting in the Underlying Cause Given in 107

1. National Center for Health Statistics. Guidance for Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19. Hyattsville, MD. 2020.