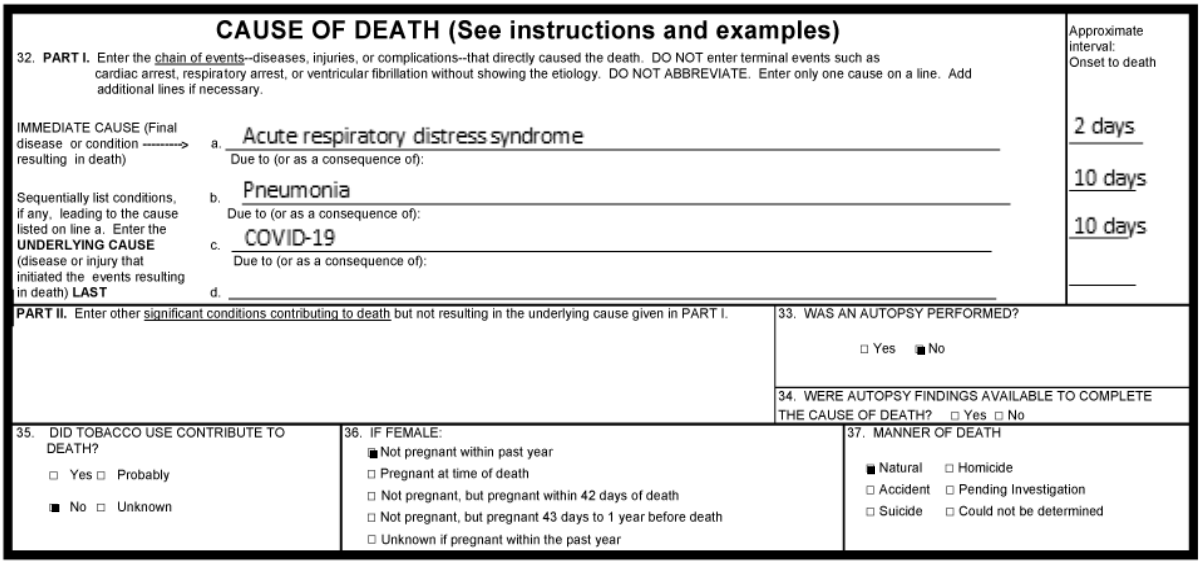
Guidance for Certifying COVID-19 Deaths

March 4, 2020

NCHS is receiving questions about how deaths involving the new coronavirus strain should be reported on death certificates. We are working on formal guidance to certifiers to be published as soon as possible. In the meantime, to address the immediate need, here is some basic information that can be shared in advance of the more formal and detailed guidance. It is important to emphasize that **Coronavirus Disease 2019** or **COVID-19** should be reported on the death certificate for all decedents where the disease caused or is assumed to have caused or contributed to death. Other terminology, e.g., SARS-CoV-2, can be used as long as it is clear that it indicates the 2019 coronavirus strain, but we would prefer use of WHO's standard terminology, e.g., COVID-19. Specification of the causal pathway leading to death in Part I of the certificate is also important. For example, in cases when 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. Here is an example:



CAUSE OF DEATH (See instructions and examples)

32. **PART I.** Enter the chain of events--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.

Approximate interval: Onset to death

IMMEDIATE CAUSE (Final disease or condition ---------> resulting in death)
a. Acute respiratory distress syndrome — 2 days
Due to (or as a consequence of):

Sequentially list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed on line a. Enter the **UNDERLYING CAUSE** (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death) **LAST**
b. Pneumonia — 10 days
Due to (or as a consequence of):
c. COVID-19 — 10 days
Due to (or as a consequence of):
d.

PART II. Enter other significant conditions contributing to death but not resulting in the underlying cause given in PART I.

33. WAS AN AUTOPSY PERFORMED? ☐ Yes ■ No

34. WERE AUTOPSY FINDINGS AVAILABLE TO COMPLETE THE CAUSE OF DEATH? ☐ Yes ☐ No

35. DID TOBACCO USE CONTRIBUTE TO DEATH? ☐ Yes ☐ Probably ■ No ☐ Unknown

36. IF FEMALE: ■ Not pregnant within past year ☐ Pregnant at time of death ☐ Not pregnant, but pregnant within 42 days of death ☐ Not pregnant, but pregnant 43 days to 1 year before death ☐ Unknown if pregnant within the past year

37. MANNER OF DEATH ■ Natural ☐ Homicide ☐ Accident ☐ Pending Investigation ☐ Suicide ☐ Could not be determined

For more general guidance and training on cause-of-death reporting, certifiers can be referred 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.

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