

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS WE RECEIVE AT INDIANA STATE VITAL RECORDS

1) Why does the State request Coroner's to submit death records with manner of death and cause of death as 'Pending' during the investigation phase?

Certifying a death record with a pending cause of death allows the legal notification of death to occur while allowing coroners to complete their investigation and receive lab results before making a cause of death determination. Once death records are certified at the state, they can be issued to family members, Social Security Administration, Office of Medicare and Medicaid, Indiana public health research teams, and CDC.

National standards set by the CDC are for all U.S. deaths to be registered within 10 days of death. Currently, Indiana requires death records to be submitted to the state within 15 days per Indiana Code 16-37-1-3.1 with the funeral home, physician, and local health department each having 5 days to certify the record once it is received in their electronic que. Although, by Indiana Code 16-37-3-7 & 36-2-14-6, coroners are given 72 hours after completion of the death investigation to file a certificate of death, the same code notes a coroner may file a pending investigation certificate of death if necessary.

2) What do I do or who do I contact if I have a question about completing the Cause of Death section?

There are a number of resources available to assist you in completing the Cause of Death section. I suggest all medical certifiers download the [Cause of Death Quick Reference Guide](#) app developed by CDC. It is available for free download from the Apple App Store and Google Play. Additional reference materials are easily accessible on the Indiana Coroners Association website under ISDH & CDC Guidance Documents. If you still have questions, feel free to call our Vital Records Data Analytics Team (Caron Peper= 317.233.2708 or Rachel Ragland= 317.234.8976)

3) Is there a best way to mark a death record as pending?

Yes, we only need the word 'pending' written for manner of death and cause of death

- Put Manner of Death drop-down menu as 'Pending'
- Write 'Pending' on Cause of Death A (no other information is needed in this area)
- The pending cause of death checkmark is optional but not required by State of CDC to mark death records as pending

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4) I lose the ability to print a death abstract if I certify and submit a record. Can this be fixed?

We have looked into this issue and understand it is a problem for some coroners. Regretfully, we are unable to modify our current system to change this. We are keeping this in mind as we plan for a new statewide death registration system. Please contact your Local Health Department or State Vital Records (Caron Peper= 317.233.2708 or Rachel Ragland= 317.234.8976) if you need a death abstract printed.

5) How do I report a cause and manner of death which could not be determined?

If the cause and/or manner of death could not be determined, “could not be determined” should be picked on the manner of death drop-down and “Could not be determined” should be written on the Cause of Death A. No other information is required in the Cause of Death section.

6) I’m receiving calls to update my cause of death. Can State Vital Records employees update the medical certification over the phone?

No, only the medical certifier on the record is permitted to alter the assigned cause/manner of death and associated injury information. There are instances where the medical certifier may authorize a State Vital Records employee to make changes to the record but, due to the Cause of Death being a written text (free-text) section, the Cause of Death section should be modified by the medical certifier.

7) Why have I been receiving calls and emails to either update or complete death records recently?

Indiana State Department of Health Vital Records Division has initiated a push to complete “unresolved records” within the state’s vital registration system to make the transfer to a new system as seamless as possible. Please be patient with us as we will be reaching out to verify the status of records which have not been registered at the State.

We have also initiated, at the request of CDC, an email request for updates for death records which have cause of death pending more than 40 days after date of death. Please take this as a general FYI and request for update as we understand there are a number of factors which cause delays in determining of cause of death.