COVID-19 Alert No. 9
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In April 2020, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) released Guidance for Certifying Deaths Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) available at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvss/vsrg/vsrg03-508.pdf. NCHS also provided answers to FAQs from certifiers about how to report deaths due to COVID-19 on death certificates, among other related topics, which can be accessed at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/faq.htm. The page has four main sections: How NCHS Collects and Reports Data on Deaths Due to COVID-19, Surveillance of Deaths Due to COVID-19, Coding Deaths Due to COVID-19, and Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19.

Certifiers should only report conditions that they determine caused or contributed to death. If the certifier determines COVID-19 is a cause of death, then they should report it on the death certificate. If the certifier determines COVID-19 did not cause or contribute to death, then they should not report it on the death certificate.

Certifying Deaths Due to COVID-19 Vaccines on Death Certificates
Like all other causes of death, if the certifier determines that a condition is a cause of death, then they should report it on the death certificate. Like any vaccine, if a certifier determines that a COVID-19 vaccine caused or contributed to death, then they should report it on the death certificate, along with any complications it caused to specify how the vaccine caused death. For example, if the certifier determines a COVID-19 vaccine was the underlying cause of death, then “adverse effects of COVID-19 vaccine” or other similar language should be reported on the lowest line used in Part I with the specific adverse effects on the lines above in a logical sequence. An example of a cause-of-death statement could be “anaphylaxis” on line a. and “allergic reaction to COVID-19 vaccine” on line b.

It is the certifier’s responsibility to determine whether there was a causal relationship between any medical condition or medical care, such as a vaccine, and the death. A temporal relationship between a vaccination and death is a necessary but not sufficient condition to indicate a causal relationship. Certifiers should not report medical conditions as causes of death on the death certificate based on only a temporal relationship.

As always, personally identifiable information, such as individual names, as well as organization names, including brand names, should not be reported in cause-of-death fields. This guidance is consistent with current procedures for cause-of-death reporting.

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