

## NON-NATURAL DEATHS

### 144.28 Medical Certification.

1. a. For the purposes of this [Iowa Code] section, “non-natural cause of death” means the death is a direct or indirect result of physical, chemical, thermal, or electrical trauma, or drug or alcohol intoxication or other poisoning.

b. Unless there is a non-natural cause of death, the medical certification shall be completed and signed by the physician, physician assistant,\* or advanced registered nurse practitioner\* in charge of the patient’s care for the illness or condition which resulted in death within seventy-two hours after receipt of the death certificate from the funeral director or individual who initially assumes custody of the body.

c. If there is a non-natural cause of death, the county or state medical examiner shall be notified and shall conduct an inquiry.

d. If the decedent was an infant or child and the cause of death is not known, the medical examiner’s inquiry shall be conducted and an autopsy performed as necessary to exclude a non-natural cause of death.

e. If upon inquiry into a death, the county or state medical examiner determines that a pre-existing natural disease or condition was the likely cause of death and that the death does not affect the public interest as described in [Iowa Code] section 331.802, subsection 3, the medical examiner may elect to defer to the physician, physician assistant,\* or advanced registered nurse practitioner\* in charge of the patient’s pre-existing condition the certification of the cause of death.

f. When an inquiry is required by the county or state medical examiner, the medical examiner shall investigate the cause and manner of death and shall complete and sign the medical certification within seventy-two hours after determination of the cause and manner of death.

2. The person completing the medical certification of cause of death shall attest to its accuracy either by signature or by an electronic process approved by rule.

### **NOTE:**

On the death certificate, the Medical Examiner should enter their case number in item #31b if the death falls within the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner.

If the Medical Examiner is deferring certification back to the physician, physician assistant,\* or advanced registered nurse practitioner\* in charge of the patient’s care or condition that resulted in death, the ME should provide the physician, physician assistant,\* or advanced registered nurse practitioner\* with the case number to be entered in item #31b on the death certificate form.

\* Effective with July 1, 2011, death events pursuant to H.F. 393, 2011 legislative session.

## **DEATHS THAT FALL UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF A MEDICAL EXAMINER**

Deaths that have an impact on the “public’s interest” are routinely investigated by the County Medical Examiners under the guidance of the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner.

Deaths affecting the public’s interest include deaths that are:

Sudden, Unexpected, Violent, Suspicious, or Unattended

Deaths that come under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner’s Office are outlined in Iowa Code section 331.802(3) and generally include, but are not limited to:

1. Violent death, including homicide, suicide, or accidental death resulting from physical.
2. Death caused by mechanical, thermal, electrical, or radiation injury.
3. Death caused by criminal abortion, including self-induced, or by sexual abuse.
4. Death related to disease thought to be virulent or contagious that may constitute a public hazard.
5. Death that occurred unexpectedly or from an unexplained cause.
6. Death of a person confined in a prison, jail, or correctional institution.
7. Death of a person who was pre-diagnosed as a terminal or bedfast case who did not have a physician in attendance within the preceding thirty days; or death of a person who was admitted to and had received services from a hospice program as defined in Code section 135J.1, if a physician or registered nurse employed by the program was not in attendance within thirty days preceding death.
8. Death of a person if the body is not claimed by a person authorized to control the deceased person’s remains under section 144C5, or a friend.
9. Death of a person if the identity of the deceased is unknown or the body is unclaimed.
10. Death of a child under the age of two years if death results from an unknown cause or if the circumstances surrounding the death indicate that sudden infant death syndrome may be the cause of death.
11. Death of a person committed or admitted to a state mental health institute, a state resource center, the state training school, or the Iowa juvenile home.
12. Death of a person under the age of 55 who died suddenly when in apparent good health;
13. Death due to suspicious circumstances.
14. Death due to unknown or obscure causes.
15. Custody deaths.