

## A GUIDE TO REPORTING DEATHS TO H.M. CORONER AND DEATH CERTIFICATION

A death is reportable to the **CORONER** if:-

1. You are in **ANY DOUBT** at all as to **THE CAUSE OF DEATH**
2. A death can be caused or contributed to or accelerated by any event, process, intervention or act and such does not have to be the main or predominant cause and the test for the Coroner (not you) is whether it contributes to the death which more than minimally, trivially or negligibly. A death should be referred if:-
  - (a) any unnatural event, process, intervention or act has or may have contributed to the death more than minimally, trivially or negligibly and/or
  - (b) where there has been a loss of opportunity to give timely treatment to a potentially effective cause of the death
3. Deaths which are **SUDDEN, UNEXPLAINED** or **SUSPICIOUS**
4. Deaths not due or not entirely due, to natural causes, e.g. all **ACCIDENTS** including late deaths from consequences **MEDICAL MISHAPS**, deaths occurring **DURING AN OPERATION** or as a **CONSEQUENCE OF THE OPERATION** or **BEFORE RECOVERY** from the effect of an **ANAESTHETIC**
5. All deaths within **24 hours** of admission to Hospital, or after any procedure, operation, treatment or anaesthetic, or discharge from Hospital and **ALL** deaths of persons under 18 years of age.
6. Deaths due or contributed to all **FRACTURES OR FALLS**
7. Deaths due or contributed to by a **DEFECT OR A FAILURE IN A SYSTEM OR PROCEDURE** or where **DEMENTIA** is involved
8. **ALL ALLEGED MEDICAL OR NURSING MISHAPS** (n.b. appropriate procedures, properly executed, are natural deaths but still reportable) or **INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT** or where a **CRITICAL INCIDENT PROCEDURE** has, is or will be recorded
9. Any case of possible **LATE DIAGNOSIS** (e.g. meningitis) or **TREATMENT**
10. Deaths **DUE** to or **CONTRIBUTED TO** by **DRUGS** (including therapeutic) where overdose, idiosyncrasy, poisoning or addiction is involved.
11. Acute alcohol poisoning (but not chronic alcoholism)
12. Where there is any doubt as to a **STILLBIRTH** e.g. any evidence that foetus breathed or showed any other signs of life. A separate guide to the reporting and/or certification is available
13. Any deaths caused or contributed to by **NEGLECT** or **SELF-NEGLECT**
14. All deaths due to **SUICIDE, MALNUTRITION, HYPOTHERMIA**
15. Any death caused or contributed to by **UNUSUAL DISEASES** (e.g. old or new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, AIDS)
16. Deaths due to or contributed to by **OCCUPATIONAL INJURY** or **DISEASE** from whatsoever cause or suspected cause e.g. pneumoconiosis, mesothelioma, farmer's lung, Weils's disease, bladder cancer etc). This means any death which you suspect could possibly be caused or contributed to by the deceased's occupation.
17. Any deaths where there is a history of recent contact with the **POLICE** or **PRISON** or possibly **ABUSED DEPENDENCY** situations such as the **MENTALLY ILL** and any death where the individual is a detained patient under the Mental Health Act 1983 or a voluntary patient in Hospital.

18. Deaths due to **TETANUS, SEPTICAEMIA** or **GANGRENE** without the known underlying cause being identified, **HEPATITIS IN A DOCTOR, DENTIST OR SIMILAR**
19. Deaths **where there is, or may be, a complaint concerning the care** of the deceased whilst in the care of **Hospital, residential home, nursing home, general practitioner or other person or persons.**

### **Death Certification by Doctors**

A licensed qualified Medical Practitioner should not sign a Certificate of Death in respect of a Death from wholly natural causes unless:-

1. He or she has attended (this means treated and/or assessed and not just saw the deceased) the patient in, and for the patient's last illness, **and**
2. Within 14 days before death **and**
3. Has seen the body after death **and**
4. Is satisfied as to the cause of death **and**
5. Is satisfied that the death is wholly from natural causes **and**
6. Is not otherwise reportable to the Coroner

Please remember that a doctors legal requirements differ between burial and cremation. The best practice is always to assume it will be a cremation and fill in the Cremation Certificate in full..

Please remember:-

1. Not to confuse modes of dying (cardiac arrest, renal failure, shock,uraemia, multiorgan failure, etc. with the pathological cause of death
2. Never use "possible" or "probable"
3. Never guess or surmise a cause of death
4. Do not promise relatives a Certificate unless you know that you can deliver
5. You are very often the only person who can decide if a death is reportable or not so it is wise for you to attend after every death (even if a burial is intended)
6. It is an offence to move or otherwise interfere with, a body or the surrounding evidence, without leave of the Coroner where death has occurred in circumstances which may lead him to hold an Inquest
7. The Registrar of Deaths is required by law to refuse registration, and to report a death to the Coroner if the Certificate of death does not comply with the legal requirements. Such refusal by the Registrar causes distress and inconvenience to relatives, and, possibly, the postponement of the funeral with all its attendant consequences.
8. These notes are provided for guidance only. They are not conclusive. If you have any doubts or are in need of help or advice as to whether or not a particular death should be reported, please contact either myself or one of my Officers. Never be afraid to seek advice. I and my Officers are always willing to discuss a case. We always try to help, (even if only by confirming what you already think) and agree the procedure over the telephone.
9. Please have the notes with you when you contact us

### **HOW TO CONTACT THE CORONER'S OFFICE**

The Coroner's Office is open between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. each normal working day. My Officers and I can be contacted 01752 204636. For reportable or referable deaths occurring outside those hours or over weekends, please report the matter to the Police by telephoning 08452 777444. For unusual or difficult cases, the Police will usually be able to contact one of the Coroner's Officers outside office hours or alternatively you can contact me at home on 01752 667600 or mobile 07870154420

**NIGEL S. MEADOWS**  
**H.M. CORONER PLYMOUTH & S.W. DEVON**

**Dated: 1<sup>st</sup> November 2003**