Illinois Health and Hospital Association

April 18, 2025

The Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA) and the Illinois Dept. of Public Health (IDPH) are collaborating to remind hospitals of their critical role providing timely certification of deaths. Illinois law requires that a medical certification be completed and signed within 48 hours after death. This memo summarizes key components of that requirement.

Who Can Certify a Death in a Hospital Setting

The Vital Records Act requires a medical certification be completed within 48 hours after death except in cases where the death is subject to a review by a coroner or medical examiner. Within the hospital setting, this should be completed by the certifying healthcare professional that was treating or managing treatment of the patient's illness or condition which resulted in death. A certifying healthcare professional can be a physician, physician assistant (PA), or advanced practiced registered nurse (APRN). Should the treating provider be absent, the Act permits certification to be completed by the provider's associate (physician, PA, or APRN), the chief medical officer, or the physician who performed the autopsy.

How To Certify a Death

After receipt of request from a funeral director, providers can certify a death by signing a paper death certificate using the "Death Certificate Worksheet," by submitting a signature via a fax attestation form, or via electronic signature, the latter two of which are through IDPH's Illinois Vital Records System (IVRS). An IDPH memo further detailing the three medical certification processes and how to register for electronic signature can be found *here*. While an electronic signature is not required, IDPH encourages this path.

Hospitals play an important role in the death certificate process. Failure to adhere to these timeframes slows down and creates inaccuracies in other federal and state mandated reporting putting, amongst other things, funding for disease management programs at risk. Further, medical certification is one of the first in a multi-step process. Delays cause significant challenges across the state to funeral directors, IDPH and, most importantly, the family of the deceased, who cannot move forward with final placement of their loved one's remains.

IHA strongly encourages hospitals to review their policies to ensure prompt response to request for death certification, including the utilization of flexibilities that are afforded under the Act.

Hospitals with questions about the death certification process, or that want to sign up for electronic signature, should contact IDPH's Division of Vital Records at dph.ivrs@illinois.gov.

If you have any other questions, please contact us *here*.