



# Determining Cause of Death

The purpose of this chart is to illustrate who is responsible for determining and entering the cause of death for a decedent in WHALES.

This is usually determined by the location and circumstances of a death.

Acronyms Used: COD = Cause of Death, PCP = Primary Care Physician, WHALES = WA Health & Life Events System

### In all situations

If no **PCP** within the past 12 months  
-and-  
**Coroner** is not taking jurisdiction  
-then-

**Cowlitz County Health Officer** *may*  
access local EMR systems and complete COD

### Hospital Emergency Dept Inpatient and Outpatient

(less than 24 hours)

- **PCP** completes COD
- **Yes** Coroner # required

### Nursing Home or Other Care Facility

- **PCP or Hospice physician** completes COD
- **Yes** Coroner # required

### Hospital Inpatient

(admitted to hospital longer than 24 hours)

- **PCP** completes COD for natural causes
- **-and-**
- **No** Coroner # required
- **--OR--**
- **Coroner** completes COD for suicide, homicide, accidental, or non-natural causes, including pending or undetermined, regardless of length of stay in hospital

### Unattended Death At Home

- **PCP** completes COD for natural causes
- **--OR--**
- **Coroner** completes COD for suicide, homicide, accidental, or non-natural causes, including pending or undetermined
- **Yes** Coroner # required for all unattended home scenarios

### Under Hospice Care

- **Hospice physician** completes COD
- **No** Coroner # required, **IF** the death occurred in the hospice facility unless the COD is suicide, accidental, homicide, or non-natural causes, including pending or undetermined

## The purpose of this chart is to explain the processes for death records.

Death records can be initiated by medical providers, funeral homes, the Coroner, or a family acting as the funeral home.

(See page 3 for family acting as the funeral Home)

CCHHS

# Death Record Flow Chart



**70.58A.200** A complete report of death must be filed with the local registrar in the local health jurisdiction where the death occurred within five calendar days after the death or finding of human remains and prior to final disposition of the human remains.

Acronyms Used: COD = Cause of Death, PCP = Primary Care Physician, WHALES = WA Health & Life Events System

Creation of Death Record

### - Record Initiated -

The decedent's demographics are entered into WHALES to start the process. The **initiator** researches and chooses the **PCP/medical certifier** from those enrolled in the system. \*

Within 2 calendar days

### - COD Entered -

Once submitted in WHALES, the record routes to a **medical certifier**. The **medical certifier** enters the COD in WHALES. \*\*  
(See "Determining Cause of Death" for details)

Within 2 calendar days

### -Burial Transit Permit Issued-

Once the COD is entered, the record routes to the **CCHHS registrar** to review the record and issue the burial transit permit per [RCW 70.58A.210](#) so the disposition of remains can occur.

Issuance of Death Certificate

### - Certificates Ordered-

**Funeral Homes** may order certified copies of death records on behalf of families for up to one year after the date of death. **Families** may order certified copies directly from CCHHS.

### -Proof of Identity and Relationship-

As per RCW 70.58A, the **CCHHS Registrar** obtains [proof of identity documentation](#) to establish the [requestors relationship](#) to the decedent.

### -Legal Certificates Prepared-

Once the identity and relationship are verified, the **CCHHS registrar** prepares certified copies of the record from WHALES and affixes the signature of the **locally appointed health officer**.

\*The process stalls if the PCP has not enrolled in the system

\*\*The process stalls if the PCP declines to enter the COD

The purpose of this chart is to explain the process for fetal death records.

Death records can be initiated by medical providers, a Funeral Home, the Coroner, or a Family acting as the Funeral Home.  
(See page 3 for family acting as the funeral Home)

# Fetal Death Record Flow Chart

CCHHS



**70.58A.200** A complete report of death must be filed with the local registrar in the local health jurisdiction where the death occurred within five calendar days after the death or finding of human remains and prior to final disposition of the human remains.

Acronyms Used: COD = Cause of Death, PCP = Primary Care Physician, WHALES = WA Health & Life Events System

Creation of Fetal Death Record

## - Paper Record is Initiated -

Within 2 calendar days

The decedent's demographics and COD is entered onto the Washington State Fetal Death Report Form # DOH 422-023 The **initiator** researches and chooses the **PCP/medical certifier**. \*

## - COD Entered -

Within 2 calendar days

**Funeral Home** submits the completed paper record to **CCHHS registrar**. **CCHHS registrar** reviews, signs the record, and emails to the State for approval.\*\*  
(See page 2 for details)

## -Burial Transit Permit Issued-

Once the State has approved the record via email, **CCHHS registrar** issues the burial transit permit per [RCW 70.58A.210](#) so the disposition of remains can occur.

Issuance of Death Certificate

## - Certificates Ordered-

**Funeral Homes** may order certified copies of death records on behalf of families for up to one year after the date of death. **Families** may order certified copies directly from CCHHS.

## -Proof of Identity and Relationship-

As per RCW 70.58A, the **CCHHS Registrar** obtains [proof of identity documentation](#) to establish the [requestors relationship](#) to the decedent.

## -Prepare Legal Certificates-

Once the identity and relationship are verified, the **CCHHS registrar** prepares certified copies of the record from WHALES and affixes the signature of the **locally appointed health officer**.

\*The process stalls if there are any fields left blank \*\*The process stalls if the PCP declines to enter the COD