



MEDICAL ACTION PROTOCOL IN CASES OF DEATH

The Medical Death Certificate (CEMED) and the Perinatal Medical Death Certificate (CEMEDEP) are medical-legal instruments that aim to universalize and standardize information about deaths occurring nationwide, thereby providing us with epidemiological and demographic information for structuring the epidemiological profile of mortality.

OBJECTIVE

To establish the action that the doctor must take at the time of death of an individual in Bolivian territory.

ISSUANCE OF MEDICAL DEATH CERTIFICATE

When a physician in the exercise of his or her duties recognizes a corpse in Bolivian territory, he or she shall be required to complete the following legal medical documents:

- **Perinatal Medical Death Certificate:** for all deaths occurring between 22 weeks of gestation and 6 days of life, administered by the Vital Statistics area of the National Health Information System, under the Ministry of Health.
- **Medical Death Certificate:** for all deaths occurring more than 6 days after birth, administered by the Vital Statistics Department of the National Health Information System, which reports to the Ministry of Health.
- **Admission medical record:** A data collection tool in which all clinical data and findings on the deceased are recorded, administered by the relevant health facility or institution.



DEFINITIONS AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN IN A SPECIFIC CASE OF DEATH

A. NATURAL DEATH

Natural death should be understood as the final result of morbid processes inherent to human pathology in which no external force intervenes in the organism or, even if it does intervene, as in the case of some infections or intercurrent actions, it is not initially possible to establish the responsibility of third parties.

a) Natural death as the end of illness and sudden death.

Depending on how quickly the final outcome occurs, we refer to natural death as the end of illness when it occurs after a prolonged period of illness, while sudden death occurs unexpectedly in a short period of time but can be explained in light of the subject's medical history (an example would be the death of a person from a heart attack after a short period of presenting symptoms).

b) Natural death while hospitalized

The doctor on duty, in accordance with established internal operating procedures, will complete and issue a Medical Death Certificate in the official printed format, administered by the vital statistics department of the SNIS-VE, which is part of the Ministry of Health.

c) Natural death in emergency services

If any diagnostic tests or examinations are performed or certified as having been performed in the hours or days prior to admission, of any examination or diagnostic tests which, together with the medical history (provided by the patient, family members, or persons accompanying the patient), allow a diagnosis to be established, the physician in charge of the case or the physician on duty shall fill out and issue the Medical Death Certificate in the official printed format, administered by the vital statistics area of the SNIS-VE, under the Ministry of Health.





If the above conditions are not met or if the body is admitted, but there is evidence of a medical history (in hospital records or through a verbal autopsy) provided by family members or close friends, the doctor on duty who examines the body will fill out and issue the Medical Death Certificate in the official printed format administered by the vital statistics department of the SNIS-VE, which is part of the Ministry of Health.

d) Natural Death in a Nursing Home

If death occurs during the on-call hours of the assigned physician, or if the physician is expected to arrive within a reasonable time frame, which in any case shall be less than 24 hours, the physician shall complete and issue the Medical Death Certificate in the official printed format administered by the Vital Statistics Department of the SNIS-VE, under the Ministry of Health.

In cases other than the above, a doctor from the public health services on duty, or the doctor with whom the residence has an agreement for this service, shall be responsible for issuing the Medical Death Certificate.

e) Natural Death in a Private Home

Without the intervention of medical services:

- If death occurs during the opening hours of the nearest health facility, a doctor from that facility will, after examining the deceased within a reasonable period of time, fill out and issue the Medical Death Certificate in the official printed format, administered by the vital statistics department of the SNIS-VE, which is part of the Ministry of Health.
- In cases other than the above, a doctor from the public health services on duty, or the doctor with whom the residence has an agreement for this service, shall be responsible for issuing the Medical Death Certificate.

The death shall be reported to the health facility by the immediate family of the deceased.



With the involvement of medical services:

The attending physician must complete and issue the Medical Death Certificate on the official printed form, administered by the vital statistics department of the SNIS-VE, under the Ministry of Health, at the place where they are attending to the patient or later, at the base health facility.

f) Natural Death on Public Roads

In the event of an incident on public roads, urgent action must be taken in the case of living persons or corpses that do not show obvious signs of death, and this is the responsibility of the emergency services or the National Police.

- If any examination prior to death or diagnostic tests are carried out which, together with the medical history provided by the patient, family members, or witnesses, allow a diagnosis to be established or reasonably rule out violent or suspicious death, the attending physician shall complete and issue the Medical Death Certificate in the official printed format, administered by the vital statistics department of the SNIS-VE, under the Ministry of Health, at the same place where the intervention takes place or later, at the base establishment.
- If the above conditions are not met, but you know from family members or close friends that the deceased had a medical history, the doctor who examines the body must prepare a medical report that will be sent to the appropriate health facility so that, based on the report and the medical history, the facility can fill out and issue the official printed Medical Death Certificate administered by the vital statistics department of the SNIS-VE, which is part of the Ministry of Health.

The death of a person on public roads in the absence of witnesses, even when there are no signs of violence, becomes a death suspected of criminality and, consequently, anyone with knowledge of it must report it to the National Police. In the event that a doctor has been involved, he or she must draw up the corresponding legal medical document consisting of the Medical Report or Certificate.



g) Natural death in ambulances

- During primary transport (patients receiving prehospital care), report the incident to the coordination center, notify and request the participation of the national police for the legal removal of the body and its transfer to the forensic morgue or wherever the national police determine. If the ambulance is occupied by a physician, he or she will issue the Medical Certificate of Death. If the death is due to external causes (accident, violence, or suspicion of foul play), the body must be transported to the health facility where it was to be treated, and the Public Prosecutor's Office must be notified.
- In the above case, if the ambulance does not have a doctor on board, the doctor at the health facility where the patient was to be treated will issue the death certificate, after receiving information from the paramedics or ambulance occupants.
- During secondary transport (referred patients), report the incident to the coordination center and the health facility that requested the transport, and request the participation of the national police to deposit the body in the morgue of the destination facility. If the death is due to an illness or complication thereof, the ambulance personnel must inform the family so that the death certificate can be issued by the attending physician or the physician at the referral health facility.

B. SUDDEN NATURAL DEATH.

This is understood to mean the unexpected death, without signs of violence or suspicion of criminality, of an apparently healthy person or in the course of a latent illness that goes unnoticed and which, consequently, cannot be explained in light of the patient's medical history.

These are individuals in whom the physician has no knowledge, either directly or through third parties, of relevant pathological history or symptoms prior to death that would justify it.





The physician who examines the body may choose one of the following options:

- Certify the death on the Medical Death Certificate, once the body has been examined, when the age of the deceased justifies it and violent or suspicious death can be reasonably ruled out.
- Medical report to the National Police, when the above circumstances do not apply, specifying, after examination of the body, any signs of violence or circumstances that lead to suspicion of criminality or third-party responsibility.

In cases of sudden natural death, the doctor required to perform the examination shall be one of those mentioned in point A, depending on the place where the death occurred.

Regardless of the provisions of the preceding paragraphs, any licensed physician is authorized to issue a Medical Certificate of Death due to natural causes.

In all cases of natural death where it is not necessary to report to the National Police or the court on duty, the physician may choose to request a clinical autopsy. To do so, they must issue a medical report or certificate stating only the fact of death using the Medical Death Certificate form, accompanied by a request for a clinical autopsy, specifying that a clinical study has not been sufficient to characterize the disease.

Regardless of the above, any registered physician is authorized to issue a Medical Death Certificate certifying the cause, date, time, and place of death.

In cases of natural death, the Medical Death Certificate issued in any of the circumstances described in sections A or B will enable the relevant funeral home to transport the body. Under no circumstances may the body be transported by the funeral home without proof of the Medical Death Certificate.



Funeral homes are not authorized to issue the Medical Death Certificate under any circumstances, under administrative or criminal penalty (as applicable) to the physician listed as the certifier on the certificate, provided that the fact is verified.

VIOLENT DEATH (EXTERNAL CAUSE)

This is considered to be death that occurs as a result of morbid processes unrelated to human pathology, with obvious external signs of violence. These are deaths triggered by some exogenous mechanism attributable to accidental, suicidal, or homicidal etiology.

In all violent deaths, even when the cause and mechanism of death are evident, the physician who attends the deceased or examines the body immediately after death must report the death to the National Police or the court on duty and prepare a medical report on the examination of the body.

The Medical Death Certificate shall be completed solely by the Medical Examiner or health personnel who certified the death upon request by a competent authority.

SUSPICIOUS DEATH OF CRIMINALITY (EXTERNAL CAUSE)

Any unnatural death in which there are no obvious signs of violence but in which we may suspect an exogenous etiology (accidental, suicidal, homicidal, or an intervening action that may result in third-party liability) is considered a death suspected of criminality.

All deaths suspected of criminality must be reported to the National Police or the court on duty, and a medical report on the examination of the body must be prepared.

The Medical Death Certificate shall be completed solely by the Medical Examiner or health personnel who have certified the death upon request by a competent authority.