

Guidance on the Verification & Registration of the Deceased with Coronavirus

Guidance for Mortuary Managers,
Registration Offices and Funeral Directors in
Warwickshire

Final 1st May 2020

Context

Internationally there are an excess number of deaths due to COVID-19. In Warwickshire we need to ensure that hospitals remain operational and that loved ones receive the highest dignity following their death. This pathway is designed to help professionals understand the handovers and expectations from mortuary to funeral.

Purpose

This guidance is to ensure there is consistency across Warwickshire, because discrepancies by area on what is offered to families for their loved ones can be distressful for the public and unhelpful for partners. This guidance has also been informed by the regional funeral protocol across the seven metropolitan councils of the West Midlands conurbation ensuring consistency across the region.

Applicability

This protocol will apply across the five Districts and Boroughs in Warwickshire, CCGs across the Coventry and Warwickshire, and Acute trusts.

Key principles

In line with the regional protocol, this guidance supports the key principles which are:

- Warwickshire County Council, the five District and Borough Councils, the CCGs and the Acute trusts in Warwickshire are committed to ensuring that the deceased and their family/friends are treated with compassion, dignity and respect.
- However, the absolute priority at the current time is to minimise the potential for the transmission of coronavirus. This supersedes the wishes of the deceased's family and/or friends.

Be aware of vulnerable adults or children unaccompanied after a death:

If a death has occurred in the community, those responding to the death should be alert for vulnerable adults or children who would be left without a responsible adult or carer.

Where an adult is unable to look after themselves, due to the level of their care and support needs, contact Adult Social Care on: 01926 410410. Our adult social care teams can offer advice and support to you and, where necessary, arrange appropriate services.

Where a child/ren is left without a supervising adult, you need to call the MASH on 01926 414144. Lines are open: Monday to Thursday - 9.00am – 5:30pm, Friday - 9.00am – 5:00pm

Out of hours - if you need to get in touch out of usual office hours, please contact the Emergency Duty Team immediately on 01926 886922

Verification and certification (MCCD) of death:

Hospital

Where the death occurs in a **hospital setting**, the doctor will verify the death; complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) and Form Cremation 4.

Community

There are two types of death which need to be clear, that is, an Expected death and an Unexpected/ Sudden death.

Expected

If a patient is expected to die, the GP should complete the verification of death form (known as Appendix 1) before death. This should happen when a patient is Amber or Red on the End of Life / Palliative Care register. This will enable those caring for the individual

to be able to recognise and verify death as appropriate. This form isn't always completed however the GP would be aware, from their knowledge of the medical history about the life expectancy of the patient. As part of these conversations preparing the family may have occurred around this time.

As a result, following an expected death, there is no requirement in English law for a GP or other registered medical practitioner to see or examine the body of a person. It has become custom and practice for GPs or another suitably qualified Health Care Professional (HCP) to visit in person and confirm death, but is not required.

Statement of death/verification of death/ Recognition Of Life Extinct (ROLE) can be done by anyone from family/care home to ambulance service and funeral director. Where none of these groups feel comfortable the flow chart in appendix 1, details how this can be carried out over telephone or video.

Once the GP is aware the death has occurred the MCCD can be completed by the GP¹

- GP who reviewed/"attended" patient during illness (period of 28 days) which lead to death
- If attending doctor cannot do so – any doctor can certify on their behalf

Ensuring expected death forms are completed and conversations with family members occur help support this process to occur.

Unexpected/ Sudden death

If the death was unexpected, the first attender (usually West Midlands Ambulance Service) would attend. They would verify the death as part of emergency care process, and link with Primary care regarding cause and the MCCD.

If no doctor has attended the deceased within 28 days of death (including video/visual consultation) or the deceased was not seen after death by a doctor, the MCCD can still be completed. However, the registrar will be obliged to refer the death to the coroner before it can be registered. In these circumstances, the coroner may instruct the registrar to accept the certifying doctor's MCCD for registration

Where the cause and the MCCD cannot be issued, they will contact the Warwickshire Police Control Centre who will apply their Sudden Death Policy to determine whether Police attendance is necessary. If Police attend and consider further investigation is required, the coroner will be contacted, and the body conveyed to the mortuary.

Registration of death²:

- Local Registration Office receives MCCD from the hospital and contacts family (by phone) to register death or, if the death is in the community, the family call and email MCCD.
- Deaths are required by law to be registered within 5 days of their occurrence unless there is to be a coroner's post mortem or an inquest

Collection of deceased and funeral:

- Once funeral directors have been sent the green form (or notification from Registry Office – process in Coventry), they will contact the mortuary or family to collect the deceased in a timely manner.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877302/guidance-for-doctors-completing-medical-certificates-of-cause-of-death-covid-19.pdf

² <https://improvement.nhs.uk/documents/6590/COVID-19-act-excess-death-provisions-info-and-guidance-31-march.pdf>

COVID-19 Local Guidance for care of the deceased in Hospital

1. Death in hospital

2. Move to hospital mortuary - For the deceased not requiring further examination by the coroner the mortuary will expedite movement of the deceased onto funeral directors

3. Doctor completes MCCD form (originally had two parts only one part needs to be completed following COVID act) and sends to hospital bereavement team to scan and email to WCC Registration Office

4. Local Registration Office receives MCCD from the hospital and contacts family to register death over the telephone. The family can also contact the Registration Office directly online at <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/deathregistration> or by calling 0300 555 0255.

5. Registration Office sends Green Form or notification to the Funeral Director to start the funeral process and the Death Certificate to the family. For more information see the website:

Funeral director then collects the deceased from the mortuary and takes to their chapel of rest.

6. Funeral is arranged, and cremation/burial is undertaken. Guidance agreed with the Districts and Boroughs of Warwickshire, outlines for Funeral Directors and those attending funerals in links below/ outlined in separate guidance:



West Midlands
Regional Funeral Protc

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19#guidance-for-communities-managing-a-death>

COVID-19 Local Guidance for care of the deceased in the community

1. Death in community

Each deceased needs to be stated as dead/ verified. This can be done by anyone who feels competent. In most cases this will be a first responder/ Paramedic or Ambulance service. It can be stated by care home staff, social care staff, family or funeral director, if they feel competent. Failing that it can be achieved following guidance over a call or video call to primary care. See appendix 1. For Birmingham guidance on a phone call or using a video conference to verify death.

2. If the death is expected or clear cause then GP or Doctor acting on their behalf completes MCCD and Form 4. See appendix 2.

MCCD provided to family of deceased or sent directly to Registration Services.

The same process applies to care homes.

3. Any query as to cause needs to occur in discussion with the coroner. If further examination needed by the coroner then deceased moved to mortuary and death in hospital pathway followed. The coroner will gather relevant evidence with support from the Police.

4. Funeral director can collect deceased and await certification. Deceased stored at funeral director's premises (if capacity) in line with Health & Safety Guidance (HSG283 Managing infection risks when handling the deceased).

5. Family contacts Registration Office with MCCD to register death. An appointment can be booked by calling 0300 555 0255 or online at <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/deathregistration>

6. Registration Office sends Green Form or notification to the Funeral Director to start the funeral process and provide the Death Certificate to the family.

7. Funeral is arranged, and cremation/burial is undertaken. Guidance agreed with the Districts and Boroughs of Warwickshire, outlines for Funeral Directors and those attending funerals in links below/ outlined in separate guidance:



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Appendix 1: Verification of death during COVID-19

Taken from the Black Country and West Birmingham Guidance and circulated across Coventry and Warwickshire Primary care 16th April 2020.

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, BMA and NHS England have released guidance regarding supporting verification of expected death to be undertaken via a video link. Where it is not possible to use a video link then verification of death may be undertaken via the telephone. This remote process is to reduce the risk of placing health care professionals at increased and unnecessary risk. The guidance provides GPs and other suitably trained HCPs with the option of supporting the death verification including performing this role remotely when it is judged clinically safe and appropriate to do so.

Each situation should be assessed and considered. There may be circumstances where it is not possible to manage the process remotely. This includes situations where someone may not have the capacity, may not feel able to support it for whatever reason or, there may be a language barrier. If there is any element of concern about supporting this process remotely then a GP or suitably trained HCP needs to attend in person.

The national process confirms that verification of death can be supported if required remotely by GPs (in hours and out of hours) or another Health Care Professional.

For Expected Deaths - no suspected Covid-19

Please follow existing current guidance to verify an expected death. If a patient is expected to die, the GP should complete the verification of death form (known as Appendix 1) before death. This should happen when a patient is Amber or Red on the End of Life / Palliative Care register. This will enable Nursing Home, and Community Nursing colleagues to be able to recognise and verify death as appropriate.

For Expected Deaths - Suspected or Confirmed Covid-19

Under the Covid-19 legislation, the usual 14 day period within which the patients GP should have seen that patient in order to allow a death to be deemed 'expected' has been extended to 28 days.

During the Covid-19 pandemic there is an emphasis on managing patients at home as appropriate. For expected deaths that occur in patients own residences the process below details how the verification of death can occur via telephone or video link.

Full Documents here:



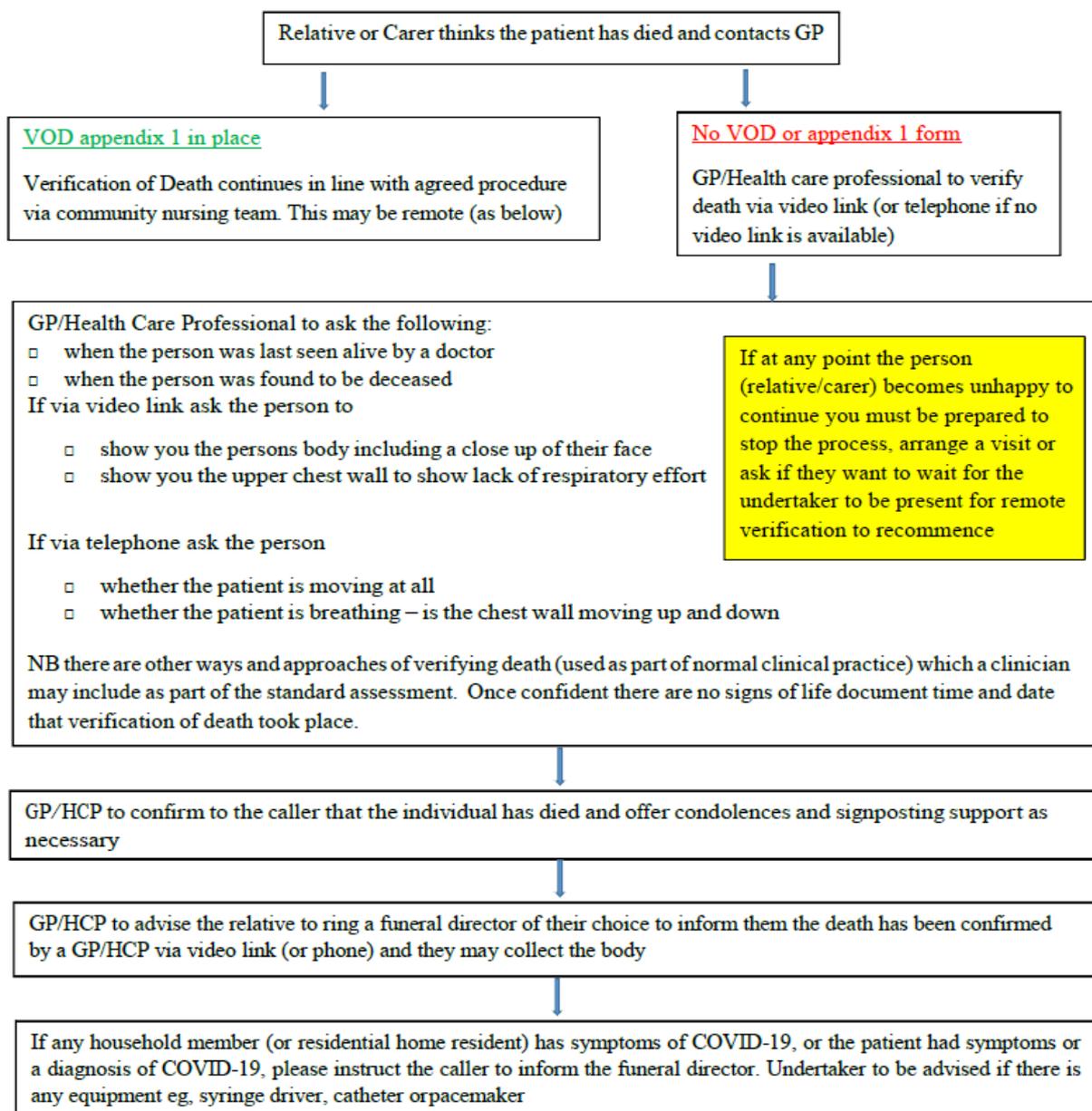
Guidance on verification of expected death



VOD remote process BCWBCCG v7.pdf



VOD Flow chart BCWBCCG v7.pdf



References:

Death verification (confirmation of death) of expected deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic. Issued 12 April 2020, NHSI/E due for review on 27th April 2020.

British Medical Association Guidance for Remote Verification of Expected Death (VoED) Out of Hospital <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/2323/bma-guidelines-for-remote-voed-april-2020.pdf>

Verification of Death (VoD), Completion of Medical Certificates of Cause of Death (MCCD) and Cremation Forms in the Community in England and Wales <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/2324/bma-verification-of-death-vod-april-2020.pdf>

Appendix 2: List of temporary law changes for COVID-19.

1. The Coronavirus Act of Parliament 25 March 2020 has led to a number of changes, as outlined in the following documents:

<https://improvement.nhs.uk/documents/6590/COVID-19-act-excess-death-provisions-info-and-guidance-31-march.pdf>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877302/guidance-for-doctors-completing-medical-certificates-of-cause-of-death-covid-19.pdf

The law change means that any doctor can complete the MCCD when it is impractical for the attending doctor to do so. It may be practical to allow a medical examiner or recently retired doctor returning to work to complete the MCCD.

"Attended" means a doctor who has cared for the patient during the illness that led to death and so is familiar with the patient's medical history, investigations and treatment. For the purposes of the emergency period, the attendance may be in person, via video/visual consultation, but not audio (e.g. via telephone). The certifying doctor should also have access to relevant medical records and the results of investigations. If no doctor has attended the deceased within 28 days of death (including video/visual consultation) or the deceased was not seen after death by a doctor, the MCCD can still be completed. However, the registrar will be obliged to refer the death to the coroner before it can be registered. In these circumstances, the coroner may instruct the registrar to accept the certifying doctor's MCCD for registration.

COVID-19 is an acceptable cause of death and does not need any further investigation unless any of the above criteria apply.

2. New powers regarding registering of deaths and funeral directors.

These include:

- a coroner is only to be notified where a doctor believes there is no medical practitioner who may sign the death certificate, or that they are not available within a reasonable time of the death
- suspending an offence in section 49 of the 2016 Act, allowing any relative of the deceased to complete the cremation application form, regardless of the required hierarchy set out by section 65 of the 2016 Act
- expanding the list of people who can register a death to include funeral directors acting on behalf of the family
- enabling electronic transmission of documents that currently have to be physically presented in order to certify the registration of a death
- removing the need for a second confirmatory medical certificate in order for a cremation to take place (Form 5, NB Form 4 is still required)
- removing the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 requirement that any inquest into a COVID-19 death must be held with a jury. Other notifiable diseases will still require and inquest with a jury.

Appendix 3: West Midlands and Warwickshire funeral guidance.



West Midlands
Regional Funeral Protocols