

# COVID-19: Death in the community

Coronavirus Act 2020, Chief Coroner's Guide, BMA (2/4/20)



# Red Whale

GEMS  
Guidelines & Evidence Made Simple

- The Coronavirus Act was passed on 25 March 2020; it applies to England only.
- It has made fundamental changes to how we handle death certification in the community.
- These changes in the law apply to ALL deaths, not just those due to COVID-19.

There is space on page 2 to personalise this document with your local details – do share with your whole team!

## Verifying death

- **Verification of death (extinction of life) can be done by ANY 'suitably qualified' person (it doesn't have to be a doctor). This includes:**
  - Nursing home staff.
  - Nurses or paramedics.
  - And, in the current situation, a funeral director or family member.
- There is **no longer a need for a GP to see the body** after death to fill in the medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD) or to complete a cremation form.
- **We do not need to do home visits in order to confirm that death has occurred.**

## Referring deaths to the coroner

- **COVID-19 is an acceptable direct or underlying cause of death:**
  - You can write it as cause of death on the certificate.
  - You do not need a positive test in patients with a typical presentation who were not tested.
- COVID-19 is not a reason on its own to refer a death to the coroner.
- If the cause of death is **not clear**, it will still need to be referred.
- Deaths in prison should still be dealt with in the usual way.

## Issuing a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD)

A doctor can issue an MCCD if a patient has been **seen** (face to face or by video) in the past **28 days** (extended from previous cut-off of 14 days).

**Any doctor** can now issue the MCCD, even if they have not personally attended the deceased, providing **ALL the following apply:**

- The patient has been seen by a medical practitioner (this could have been by video consultation but NOT telephone consultation) in the 28 days before death **or** after death.
- The doctor who **HAS** seen the patient is unable to sign the certificate or it is impractical for them to do so.
- The signing doctor is able, from the information available, to determine the cause of death to the best of their knowledge/belief.

When the certifying doctor completes the MCCD, the name and GMC number of the doctor who did attend the patient should be entered in the 'last seen alive' section.

### **What if the deceased has not been seen in the past 28 days?**

- It may still be possible to sign the MCCD if the medical practitioner feels able to state the cause of death to the best of their ability.
- In this case, the death **DOES** need to be referred to the coroner:
  - Agreement regarding cause of death/issuing of certificate needs to be obtained from the coroner.
  - Contact the coroner in writing (most areas have a form to send by secure email).
  - If the coroner agrees, the MCCD can be issued with the presumed cause of death and circling 'Option 4: refer to the coroner'.



## Registering deaths

For the duration of the Coronavirus Act, registration of death does not have to be done in person and can be done by telephone. It does still have to be done within 5 days.

- Funeral directors have been added to the list of people who **can** register the death (in the event, for example, that the family is self-isolating).
- Family members will be able to call the registrar's office (**REGISTRAR NUMBER** \_\_\_\_\_).
- Death certificates should be scanned/photographed and transferred electronically by secure email from the practice to the registrar. This is recommended best practice during the pandemic.
- *You will be supplied with an email address* (**REGISTRAR'S EMAIL ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_).
- **All original forms will need to be stored securely to be send to the register office after this period has passed.**

## Burial and cremation

### Burial

- Secure local procedures *should* be available and followed, and the body can be released as soon as the MCCD has been completed but *without* formal registration.
- Bodies cannot be disposed of until the registrar issues the green form.

### Cremation

For the duration of the Coronavirus Act, cremation can be undertaken on the basis of just ONE medical certificate (form Cremation 4, colloquially known as the 'Part 1').

- The form Cremation 4 can be completed as an interactive PDF (see below) and saved *before* sending by secure email.
- Cremation 4 can be completed by ANY medical practitioner in the event that the attending doctor cannot complete it or that is it impractical for them to do so.
- Examination of the body is NOT required to complete Cremation 4, providing the deceased was seen (in person or by video) within the 28 days before death.
- The need for form Cremation 5 (colloquially known as the 'Part 2') has been suspended.
- People with pacemakers or ICDs will have to be buried as removal of the devices for cremation is felt to be too risky.

## What to write on form Cremation 4?

<p><b>Question 5:</b> Were you the deceased's usual medical practitioner?</p>	<p><i>If the answer is 'NO', enter 'Certifying doctor' in role if you did not attend the deceased</i></p>
<p><b>Question 6:</b> Please state how long you attended the deceased during their last illness?</p>	<p><i>'Not applicable' is acceptable</i></p>
<p><b>Question 7:</b> Please state the number of days and hours before the deceased's death that you last saw them alive?</p>	<p><i>'Not applicable' is acceptable</i></p>
<p><b>Question 8:</b> Please state the date and time that you saw the body of the deceased and the examination that you made of that body.</p>	<p><i>'Not applicable' is acceptable</i></p>
<p><b>Question 9:</b> From your medical notes, and the observations of yourself and others immediately before and at the time of the deceased's death, please describe the symptoms and other conditions which led to your conclusions about the cause of death.</p>	<p><i>Record the name and GMC number of the doctor who attended within the past 28 days, the DATE the deceased was seen and a summary of what was entered in the record by the attending doctor.</i></p>