

Pneumonia Without an Underlying Cause of Death

Pneumonia is a common complication of surgery and is also a common complication of injuries. If pneumonia is the only condition reported on a death certificate, more information is needed to determine if an injury or surgery contributed to the death.

Pneumonia can be a complication of many diseases or conditions, especially those that decrease the mobility of patients, such as severe Alzheimer’s disease or stroke. Pneumonia can be a complication of AIDS or conditions such as congestive heart failure. If the certifier is aware that a specific bacterial or viral infection caused the pneumonia, that information should be reported on the death certificate (e.g., Streptococcal pneumonia, *Pseudomonas pneumonia*).

Pneumonia is a leading cause of death and may exist without any underlying conditions. In those cases, it is best for the certifier to report “primary pneumonia.” Adding the term “primary” informs nosologists that there were no underlying or contributing causes that the certifier did not report.

Acceptable Reporting of Pneumonia as Cause of Death for Death Certificates

Listed in Part I on Cause of Death Page in OVERS (item 50 on paper form)

Example 1:

- a) Streptococcal pneumonia – 48 hrs
- b) Congestive heart failure – year
- c) Ischemic cardiomyopathy – yrs

Example 2:

- a) Pneumonia – 3 days
- b) Coronary artery bypass surgery – 6 days
- c) Arteriosclerotic heart disease – yrs

Example 3:

- a) Primary Pneumonia – days

Example 4:

- a) Pneumonia – 72 hours
- b) Pathological fractured hip – 5 days
- c) Osteoporosis – years

Note: If a fracture contributed to death, then the case should be referred to your local medical examiner. If the medical examiner chooses not to take jurisdiction, then the death certificate may be completed by a physician, osteopath, chiropractor, naturopath, physician assistant or nurse practitioner. If the fracture was not pathological, then items on the Injury page in OVERS (items 55-61 on the paper form) must be completed.

Note: If there are any signs of injury, trauma, drug overdose, abuse or neglect, contact your medical examiner.

For more information, visit:

<https://bit.ly/orvrMEDCERT>