



# OHIO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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John R. Kasich/Governor

Richard Hodges/Director of Health

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Coroners, Funeral Directors, Hospitals, Local Health Districts, and Physicians  
FROM: Rick Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health  
DATE: September 17, 2015  
RE: Death Certificate – Physician Signature Update

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is committed to developing solutions to streamline the death certificate process, such as by enabling physicians to sign death certificates electronically. I am writing to give you an update on these efforts. Language was included in the State Fiscal Year 2016-17 operating budget bill (Am. Sub. H.B. 64) modifying requirements related to physician signatures on death certificates. Under the new law, funeral directors may now accept scanned/e-mailed or faxed copies of death certificates containing the original signature of physicians and then file these electronic copies with the appropriate Vital Statistics office.

To ensure a smooth transition, the ODH Bureau of Vital Statistics recommends the following practices:

- Confirm with the physician or the physician's office the recommended designated secure line between entities (avoid using a personal e-mail account or fax machine).
- Verify that the transmission of documents does not alter the legibility or the size of the electronic copies.
- Advise physicians to utilize secure measures when disposing of documents.

In addition, the Bureau of Vital Statistics is working with ODH's Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) vendor to develop a mobile web application for which physicians can sign up to receive electronic copies of death certifications which they can complete and sign electronically – similar to the current coroner e-certification procedure. A pilot has been fully developed and tested; however, there are some issues that must be resolved before full implementation unless a more viable long-term solution is identified.

ODH is committed to continuous process improvement, and we are working on potential solutions that may include a (1) Short term plan to incorporate the physician e-certification prototype into the current EDRS workflow, and/or a (2) Long-term plan encompassing a comprehensive electronic death registration process including local registrar filing and e-certification for funeral homes.

We are committed to enhancing the EDRS system and appreciate the patience you have demonstrated while we pursue these improvements. I will keep you updated in the coming months on our progress. Meanwhile, please do not hesitate to contact Karen Sorrell, Chief of the Bureau of Vital Statistics, at (614) 995-5398 or [karen.sorrell@odh.ohio.gov](mailto:karen.sorrell@odh.ohio.gov) if you have any questions or concerns.

ORC 3705.08 (D) (4) allows for any information or signature required in the creation of a record be recorded in a photographic, electronic or other means. This modification to the Ohio Revised Code is in effect and will allow the funeral homes and physicians to be able to electronically move a death certificate that needs to be completed via e-mail or fax machine. This should simplify the process for being able to gather information and signatures to file a completed death record.

Please remember that even if the final death record has a facsimile signature of a funeral director or physician, the contents of the record shall be legible without cross-outs or missing information. Also, the size of the document shall be the exact size of a standard death certificate at time of filing. If the document size is not accurate or if there is fax transmission information printed at the top, the death certificate shall not be accepted for filing at your office. The vital statistics staff should work with the funeral home to resize or remove information from the death certificate prior to filing.

While we work on ensuring that all parties understand these new requirements, please take a moment to review the Frequently Asked Questions listed below to clarify some common questions.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q: If the death certificate has a header with the name of the office, date and time listed on the death certificate when it is presented to the local office for filing, is it okay to accept the certificate for filing?**

A: No. All death certificates shall have only the required fields and no additional fax information as part of the document. If a funeral director tries to file a death certificate with a fax header on the document, please do not accept that certificate for filing and ask that the certificate be reprinted without the additional information.

**Q: Can only a physician's signature be a faxed or a scanned copy on the certificate?**

A: No. According to Ohio Revised Code 3705.08 (D)(4), information and signatures required in certificates, records, or reports authorized by this chapter may be filed and registered by photographic, electronic, or other means as prescribed by the director. Any signature on the document can be a photocopy including the funeral director's signature.

**Q: A funeral director would like to scan a completed copy of the death certificate to my office for me to file. Is this okay?**

A: No. At this time, funeral directors shall still file the completed death record in person or by sending the copy (unfolded) to the proper filing office. In the future, we hope to be able to devise a workflow with our local vital statistics to allow for fax filing.

**Q: I am having problems trying to decipher the cause of death on the death certificate, but I can clearly make out the scanned signature of the physician. Should I accept this document for filing?**

A: No. All sections of the death certificate shall be legible and free of corrections. If your office cannot make out the cause of death information that has been printed on the death record, please instruct the funeral home to resend a copy to the physician to complete legibly.

**Q: Can I accept a faxed or scanned signature on a Medical Supplement form?**

A: Yes. A physician's signature on a Medical Supplement can be faxed or scanned prior to being accepted for filing.