

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride

HSS(MD)18/2020

For Action:

Chief Executives of HSC Trusts
Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Medical Practitioners*)
Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses and Midwives*)
Chief Executive HSCB (*for onward distribution to All General Practitioners, Practice Managers, GP Locums and GP Out of Hours Services*)
Director of Integrated Care, Health and Social Care Board
PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

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Our Ref: HSS(MD)18/2020
Date: 27 March 2020

Dear Colleague

GUIDANCE ON THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COMPLETION AND ISSUING OF MEDICAL CERTIFICATES OF CAUSE OF DEATH AND STILLBIRTH CERTIFICATES

This communication is to provide guidance to doctors and midwives in relation to the new arrangements for the completion and issuing of Medical Certificates of Cause of Death (MCCD) or Stillbirth Certificates - Tab A.

Action required

Chief Executives must ensure that this information is drawn to the attention of all clinical staff to enable them to respond accordingly.

The HSCB must ensure that this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and OOH facilities immediately.

Background

The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on Wednesday 25 March 2020 and contains clauses which impact on the death certification process, the issuing of both MCCDs and Stillbirth Certificates and referrals to the Coroner.

The Act makes provision to change who is permitted to complete a MCCD:

- If the original treating doctor cannot certify the death, then a colleague from the same hospital or GP Practice can certify the death;
- If the deceased has not been treated within 28 days and dies of a natural illness, any medical practitioner who can state, to the best of their knowledge and belief, the cause of death, is permitted to sign the MCCD.

There are also changes to the way in which deaths will now be registered. Registration Offices will no longer be open to the public with all registrations being completed remotely.

Under these emergency provisions there will no longer be a requirement for medical practitioners or midwives to give the MCCD or Stillbirth Certificate to the informant to take to the General Register Office (GRO).

Instead the medical practitioner or midwife must send a copy of the MCCD or Stillbirth Certificate to the GRO by electronic means. This will mean that the completed MCCD or Stillbirth Certificate will need to be scanned and sent directly to a specific GRO mailbox.

These provisions remove the face-to-face contact between the practitioner and the informant and then the informants and registrars. When providing the certificates to the GRO, the contact information on the next of kin should be provided by the clinician/midwife and, where known, the details of the Funeral Director appointed by the family. This will allow the Registrar to contact the next of kin to obtain the required registration information and for the issue of the certificate to the Funeral Director to allow disposal of the body to take place.

With the removal of the requirement for the certifying doctor to have treated the deceased within 28 days, this will also impact on referrals to the Coroner. This will allow for those deaths, that would ordinarily have been referred to the Coroner for certification using the Form 14 (Pro-forma) process, to be certified using a MCCD.

These provisions also see modifications to the Cremation Form B completed by the certifying doctor and removes the requirement for the completion of the Cremation Confirmatory Certificate, Form C.

Action

I would ask that this information is cascaded to all relevant staff as a matter of urgency.

Please note this new guidance will be available on the Department website at the 'Guidance Surrounding Death' pages <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/guidance-surrounding-death>

Yours sincerely

Personal Data

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Chief Medical Officer

Circulation List

Executive Medical Director/Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant staff*)

Chief Nursing Officer, Department of Health

Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board

RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers including independent hospitals*)

Name Redacted Postgraduate Dean, NIMDTA

Chief Executive, NIPEC

Registrar General for Northern Ireland

Justice Keegan, NI Coroners Service

This letter is available on the Department of Health website at
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>

NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COMPLETION AND ISSUING OF MEDICAL CERTIFICATES OF CAUSE DEATH AND STILLBIRTH CERTIFICATES

Following the introduction of the Coronavirus Act, the following changes on completing of the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) and the issuing of MCCDs and Stillbirth Certificates will take effect immediately.

WHO CAN COMPLETE THE MCCD

Doctors certifying deaths do so as a *statutory* duty under the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 Section 25(2). **The following new arrangements apply to all deaths occurring during the pandemic:**

- If the medical practitioner (Dr A) has treated the deceased within the last 28 days and the death is as a result of a natural illness, then the MCCD can be completed as usual.
- If Dr A has treated the deceased within the last 28 days **but** is unable to complete the MCCD or it is impracticable for Dr A to do so (i.e. through unavailability, illness or pressure from other duties etc.), **another practitioner (Dr B) from the same hospital or GP practice, can sign the MCCD**, provided the deceased died as a result of a natural illness and Dr B can state, to the best of their knowledge and belief, the cause of death.
- In the event that neither Dr A nor Dr B can complete the MCCD, **any medical practitioner (Dr C) can complete the MCCD**, as long as the death was as a result of a natural illness and they can state the cause of the death to the best of their knowledge and belief. **Dr C does not have to have treated the deceased within the last 28 days.**

ISSUING OF THE MCCD

MCCDs should continue to be completed using either the NIECR for hospital deaths or GRO Form 12 (MCCD booklet) for community deaths.

Once completed, **all MCCDs MUST be scanned and emailed** to the GRO using:

GRO-pandemic@finance-ni.gov.uk.

The email **should contain the contact details for the next of kin** and, if known the name of the Funeral Director appointed by the family. This will allow for the certificate to be issued directly to the Funeral Director to enable disposal of the body to proceed.

If the family are in attendance and request a copy of the MCCD this should be provided. However, a copy of the MCCD **MUST still be scanned and emailed** directly to the GRO as directed. Hard copies of any certificates not issued to the next of kin can be retained and sent to the GRO at a later date.

STILLBIRTH CERTIFICATES

The process for the completion of a stillbirth certificate remains the same. However, the completed certificate **MUST now be scanned and emailed** directly to the GRO using:

GRO-pandemic@finance-ni.gov.uk.

The email **should contain the contact details for the next of kin (usually the mother)** and, if known, the name of the Funeral Director appointed by the family.

If a copy of the Stillbirth certificate is requested by the parent(s), this should be provided, however, a copy of the Stillbirth Certificate **MUST still be scanned and emailed** directly to the GRO as directed. Hard copies of any certificates not issued can be retained and sent to the GRO at a later date.

REFERRAL TO THE CORONER

During the Pandemic, there is **no requirement** under Section 7 of the Coroners Act (NI) 1959, for deaths to be reported to the Coroner when the death is as a result of a natural illness (**including Covid-19**). In a change to usual practice under the Coronavirus Bill, an MCCD can be issued if the deceased **had not been treated within the last 28 days**, and a medical practitioner can state to their best knowledge and belief, the cause of death.

This allows deaths that would ordinarily have been referred to the Coroner for certification using the Form 14 (Pro-forma) process to be certified using a MCCD.

If the death is not thought to be of natural causes and is in any way suspicious or unexpected the death should still be reported to the Coroner as per Section 7, for their appropriate action.

CREMATION PROCESSES

Where cremation is the preferred means of disposal the terms under which the statutory cremation forms are completed has been modified. The Coronavirus Act states that to complete Form B, the registered medical practitioner **does not have to have treated the deceased within the last 28 days**, but **must be able to certify the cause of death**.

This has effect that all references to attending/treating the deceased within the last 28 days prior to death are omitted from Form B. Following completion of Form B, on most occasions it should be sent by the Funeral Director directly to the Medical Referee for appropriate action.

There is no longer a requirement for Cremation Confirmatory Form C to be completed before a cremation can take place.