

FAQS for Funeral Homes

Regarding Death Certificates

1. What information on the Death Certificate can be updated or changed with an affidavit?

- Deceased information
 - The correct spelling of a name (but you cannot change the name)
 - Sex
 - Age, Date of Birth, Military Status
 - Name of Institution, County of Death
 - City or Town of Death, Street or place of Death
 - State of Deceased Residence
 - County of Deceased Residence
 - City or Town of Residence
 - Street Address of Residence
 - Name of deceased mother, Race
 - Education, Citizen, Birthplace
 - Correct spelling of name, SSN, Occupation
 - Kind of Business
 - Correct spelling of informant

2. What areas of a death certificate cannot be corrected with an affidavit?

- Date of Death
- Marital Status
- Physician section

3. What should a funeral home do when an affidavit cannot be used to correct an item?

When an affidavit cannot be used to correct an item, a new death certificate is required.

4. When is it necessary for a Funeral Home to go to the State Vital Statistics Office for death certificates?

One: Amendments

- When the "A" copy of the death certificate has already been mailed to the State Vital Statistics Office.

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- Call the local health department where the death certificate was filed and see if the "A" copy has been mailed. Corrections can only be made on the "A" copy.

Two: Five Year Rule

- Each Health Department is required to keep part B of the Death Certificate for five years from the date of filing.

Beyond the five years; a funeral home will have to go to the State Vital Statistics Office.

5. What should a Funeral Home do when the physician signs the death certificate in blue ink and refuses to sign in black ink?

Effective July 1, 2008, the Code of Virginia was amended so that physicians have the ability to sign in dark blue ink. [32.1-263](#)

6: What can a Funeral Home do when the physician has taken the death certificate out of the office and there is difficulty in tracking him down, or the ER physician is unwilling to sign the death certificate because the patient is from out-of-state?

In the absence of the physician or with his approval, the certificate may be completed and signed by an associate physician, the chief medical officer of the institution in which death occurred, or the physician who performed an autopsy upon the decedent, if such individual has access to the medical history of the case and death is due to natural causes. [32.1-263](#). If there are continuous problems with a particular physician, you can file a complaint with the Department of Health Professionals.

7. What happens when the family insists the SSN is correct but they do not have any documentation to support this and the Social Security Administration records show the SSN is incorrect?

Leave the incorrect SSN on the death certificate, the Social Security Administration will mail a letter to the family addressing the incorrect SSN.

8. If the date of birth given by the family is incorrect and they cannot provide documentation and the hospital records have another date of birth; what choice does the Funeral Home have?

- Call the hospital and make inquiries asking how they obtained their information concerning the date of birth.
- See if they are willing to fax the source of this information to you, so you can show the family.
- If there is still a conflict; contact the State Registrar's Office.

9. What does the funeral home do when the family does not like the cause of death and a new death certificate is done?

- The funeral home should not get the physician to change the diagnosis solely on the family's opinion.
- The decision should be based on the facts in the patient's medical records.

If the family is insistent; have them contact the physician and if anything changes, the physician can notify the funeral home.

10. Should the funeral home call the health department to notify them of the update or change so the registrar can pull the original death certificate?

- No advance notice is needed for Henrico; other health departments may differ.
- The funeral home can let the Henrico Vital Records Office know of the change when they come in to have that death certificate filed.
- Please let the registrar know it is a REFILE. When a Registrar is not notified of a Refile the deceased is given two numbers.

Refile: Filing a new death certificate on the same person.

11. How can the Funeral Home find out if the death certificate has been amended?

- Call the Medical Examiner
- Call the local Health Department where the death certificate was filed.

12: When should "None" be used on line 7 of a death certificate?

"None" should be used when a person dies at a residence and block 7 should be left blank.

13. When should "DOA" used on line 7 of a death certificate?

"DOA" is used as an abbreviation for "dead on arrival" at the emergency room when the body is taken to a hospital. Only hospitals can determine if the person is DOA.

14: When should "Unknown" be used on Line 15 & 16 of the Death Certificate?

If the mother's name or father's name is not known.

15. What are some suggestions that will assist the Registrars in processing Death Certificates?

Vital Records Application

- Please complete the entire application with a funeral home director signature and ID number.
- *Suggestion: Make copies of the complete application with the signature and number.*

Examine Certificate

- Please examine the death certificate before leaving the physician's office.
- In case of error, have an extra death certificate ready for the physician to sign immediately.

Be Organized

- Have the check with the correct amount and the application completed.
- Please ensure the number of copies corresponds with the amount of the check.
- There may be times when the registrar may request that you leave your death certificates and return at a later time to pick them up.

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Do not attempt to file a death certificate with the following errors:

- Typeovers
- Strikethroughs
- Corrections without an accompanying affidavit (Unauthorized Corrections)
- Erasures
- Whiteouts
- When the street is misspelled
- Ordinary names are misspelled
- Information not in the appropriate blocks or just left totally blank.

Web Resources

- The Virginia Department of Health Vital Records website:
- http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/vital_Records/index.htm

Code of Virginia:

- [32.1-263](#) - Filing death certificates; medical certification; investigation by medical examiner.
- [32.1-265](#) - Transit permits; permits for disinterment and reinterment.

We hope you have found this information helpful. It is our pleasure to serve you.

-Henrico County Department of Vital Records