

**MEDICAL EXAMINER REPORTING
TYPES OF DEATHS TO BE REPORTED TO THE
KING COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON**

Jurisdiction is vested in the King County Medical Examiner over all bodies who come to their death as described in RCW 68.08.010. This section explains the types of deaths in that statute. All of them must be reported to the Medical Examiner's Office. Although we have tried to be as complete and specific as possible in compiling this list, we realize there will always be cases that may not fit the criteria exactly. Please call the Medical Examiner's Office, 206-731-3232, if you are uncertain whether a case falls within our jurisdiction.

- 1) Persons who die suddenly when in apparent good health and without medical attendance within thirty-six (36) hours preceding death. This category should be reserved for the following situations:
 - A. Sudden death occurring in a person without a known natural cause;
 - B. Death during an acute or unexplained rapidly fatal illness, for which a reasonable natural cause has not been established;
 - C. Deaths occurring in anyone not under the care of a licensed physician;
 - D. Deaths of persons in nursing homes or other institutions where medical treatment is not provided by licensed medical personnel.
- 2) Circumstances indicate death caused entirely OR IN PART by unnatural or unlawful means. This category includes but is not limited to:
 - A. Drowning, suffocation, smothering, burns, electrocution, lightning, radiation, chemical or thermal injury, starvation, environmental exposure, neglect;
 - B. Unexpected deaths during, associated with, or as a result of, diagnostic or therapeutic procedures;
 - C. All deaths in the operating room whether due to surgical or anesthetic procedures;
 - D. Narcotics or other addictions, other drugs including alcohol or toxic agents, or toxic exposure;
 - E. Death thought to be associated with, or resulting from the decedent's occupation; this includes chronic occupational disease such as asbestosis and black lung;
 - F. Death of the mother caused by known or suspected abortion;
 - G. Deaths occurring from apparent natural causes during the course of a criminal act, i.e., victim collapses during a robbery.
 - H. Deaths that occur within one year following an accident even if the accident is not thought to have contributed to the cause of death;
 - I. Death following all injury producing accidents, if recovery was considered incomplete or if the accident is thought to have or may have contributed to the cause of death (regardless of the interval between accident and death).
- 3) Suspicious circumstances. This category includes but is not limited to deaths under the following circumstances.
 - A. Deaths resulting from apparent homicide or stabbing;
 - B. Hanging, gunshot wounds, stabs, cuts, strangulation, etc.;
 - C. Alleged rape, carnal knowledge, or sodomy;
 - D. Deaths during the course of, or precipitated by, a criminal act;
 - E. Deaths that occur while in a jail, prison, in custody of law enforcement, or other non-medical public institutions.
- 4) Unknown or obscure causes. This category includes:
 - A. Bodies that are found dead (see criteria #1);
 - B. Deaths during or following an unexplained coma.
- 5) Deaths caused by any violence whatsoever, whether the primary cause or any contributory factor in the death. This category includes but is not limited to:
 - A. Injury of any type including falls;
 - B. Any deaths due to, or contributed to, by any type of physical trauma.
- 6) Contagious disease. This category includes only those deaths wherein the diagnosis is undetermined, and a contagious disease which may be a public health hazard is a suspected cause of death.
- 7) Bodies that are not claimed. This category is limited to cases where no next-of-kin or other legally responsible representatives can be identified for disposition of the body.
- 8) Premature and stillborn infants. This category includes only those stillborn or premature infants whose birth was precipitated by maternal injury, criminal or medical negligence, or abortion under unlawful circumstances.

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