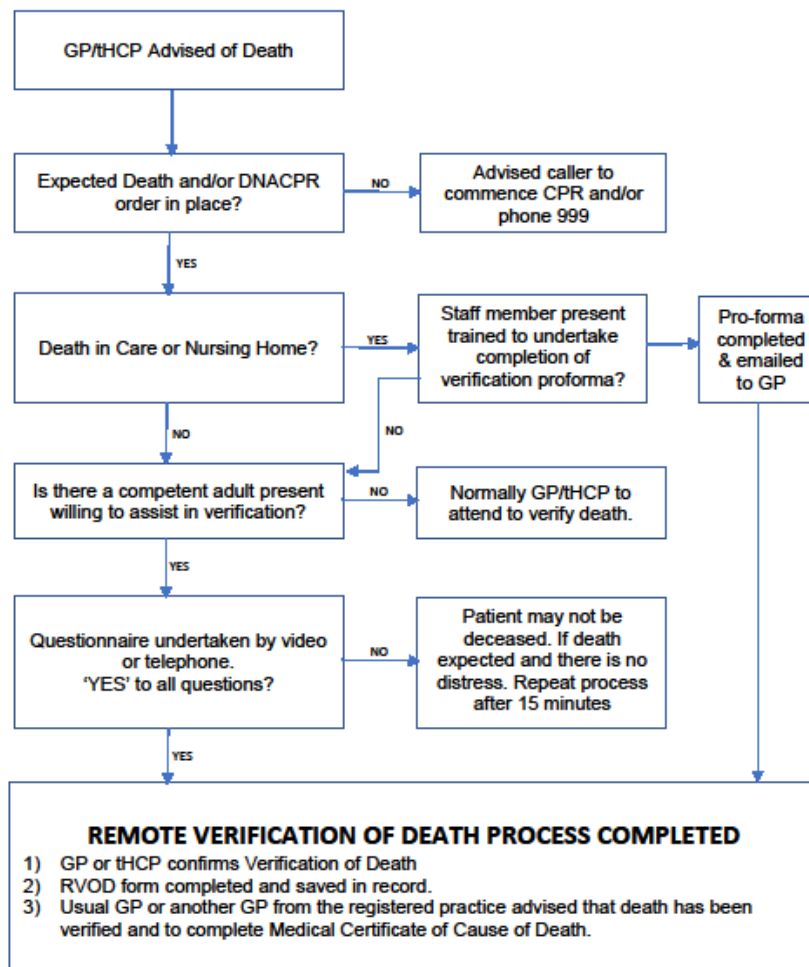


## COVID-19: Death verification and death & cremation certification

### A. Death verification (unchanged by the Coronavirus Act)

Verification of death is the process of identifying that a person has died. English Law allows that any competent adult may verify that someone has died. Some doctors have expressed concern that being asked to attend cases where death is clear and expected, and verification could reasonably have been performed by others, either independently or with remote support, creates unnecessary risk. It draws them away from providing care to the seriously sick and creating an additional unnecessary infection risk to them, their patients or those who were caring for the deceased.

The DHSC issued guidance on remote verification of death on 05.05.2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-verification-of-death-in-times-of-emergency/coronavirus-covid-19-verifying-death-in-times-of-emergency#remote> The BMA, in partnership with the RCGP, has produced a protocol for remote assistance in verifying death. This will allow a competent adult to access help and guidance via video link from a clinician to allow that clinician safely and quickly to verify that death has occurred. The protocol is summarised below: we commend it to all health and care staff and those other competent adults in the community that are comfortable in following this guidance.



<https://cambslmc.org/covid-19-updates-and-resources/> has proformas for remote verification in care home / at home.

**Suspicious deaths** must be reported to the police.

**Unexpected deaths, deaths from unnatural causes, or deaths from uncertain causes** need to be reported to the local coroner to begin the process of establishing a cause of death.

## **B. Death Certification (COVID-19 advice and changes by the Coronavirus Act)**

- COVID-19 is an acceptable direct or underlying cause of death for the purposes of completing the MCCD.
- COVID-19 as a direct or underlying cause of death is not a reason on its own to refer a death to a coroner.
- COVID-19 is a notifiable disease, but this does not mean referral to a coroner is required by virtue of its notifiable status.
- If a patient dies with clinically probable COVID-19 but the results of confirmatory swabs are not yet available, put cause of death as COVID-19 infection. Also circle 2 on the MCCD ("information from post mortem may be available later"): this does not mean a post mortem needs to be done but flags that the results of investigations may be available at a later date.
- If it has not been possible to diagnose COVID-19 as an illness in life (clinically or with positive test) and the cause of death is unclear the case needs to be discussed with the Coroner's Officer. The Coroner will then decide if a post-mortem is needed.

**The Coronavirus Act 2020 has made changes to the requirements for death and cremation certification in recognition that the doctor who saw the patient during their last illness may be unable to sign the certificate or it might be impractical for them to do so.**

- If possible, a doctor who has last seen (including by video, but not by phone) the patient alive within 28 days before the death (previously 14 days) should complete the MCCD.
- If that is not possible, any doctor can complete the MCCD if: a) they are able to give a cause of death (for example from the clinical records) and b) a doctor seen the patient alive within 28 days of death or viewed the body in person after death. Record the name and GMC number of the doctor who attended the deceased during their last illness or after death at the 'last seen alive' section of the MCCD.
- If no doctor saw the patient within 28 days before death or after death, any doctor may still be able to complete the MCCD if: a) they are able to give a cause of death (for example from the clinical records) and b) the Coroner has given permission for them to complete the MCCD.
- Registration of the death can be by any family member, or a funeral director if the next of kin are self-isolating, and now must be undertaken electronically. The Registrars' offices are all closed: face-to face registration is not possible. Scan front and back of MCCD form, include name and contact number for the bereaved family and email to [cambsreg@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:cambsreg@cambridgeshire.gov.uk) or [registerofficecertificates@peterborough.gov.uk](mailto:registerofficecertificates@peterborough.gov.uk)
- Then ask the family to go to <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/births-deaths-and-marriages/deaths/registering-a-death> to register the death online, or call 0345 045 1363 to book a telephone appointment to register the death. Retain the original MCCD: do not give it to the family.

## **C. Cremation certification (COVID-19 advice and changes by Coronavirus Act)**

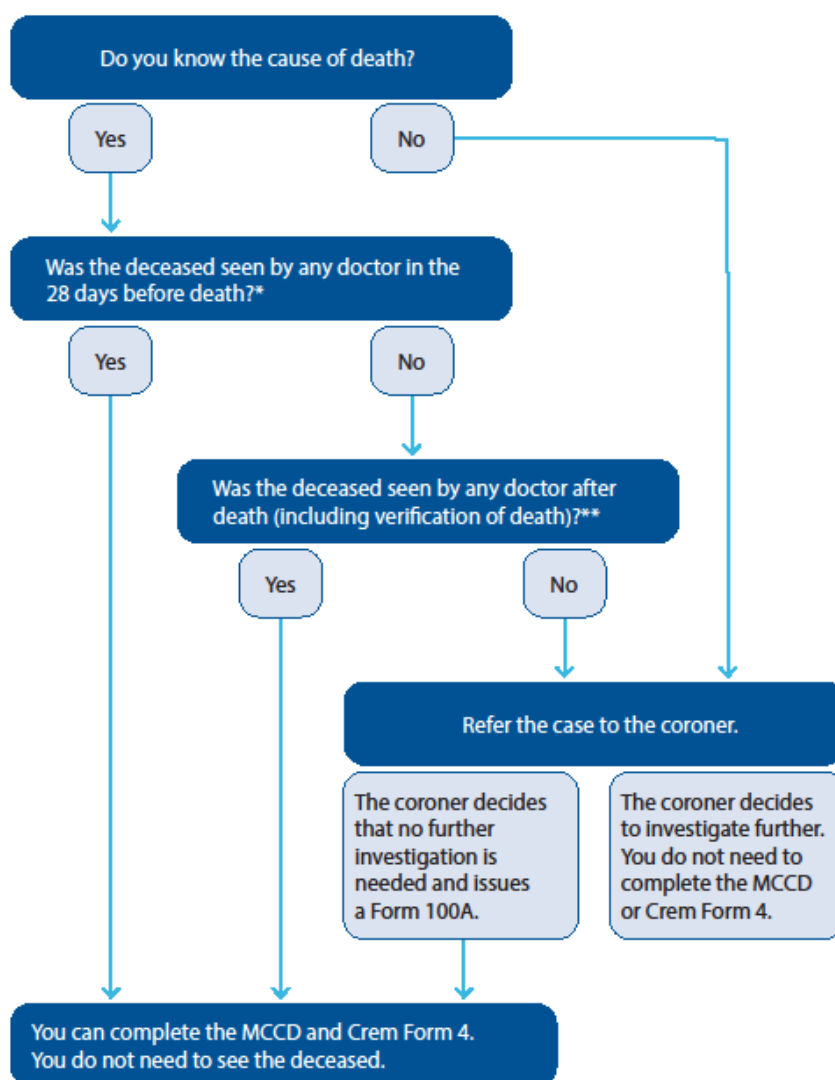
- If the patient died with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 with a pacemaker or defibrillator in situ, cremation may not be possible due to the risk to mortuary staff or GP of removal: this at the discretion of the individuals involved. Cremation may be particularly important for certain cultural and religious groups.
- Cremation Form 5 is suspended. Only form 4 is needed: this is available as a pdf which can be completed and submitted electronically.
- Examination of the body is not required for completion of Cremation Form 4 if the deceased was seen by a medical practitioner (including video consultation) in the 28 days before death.

- Any medical practitioner can now complete Cremation Form 4, even if they did not attend the deceased during their last illness if:
    - The medical practitioner who did attend the deceased is unable to sign the Cremation Form 4 or it is impractical for them to do so
- AND
- A medical practitioner has seen the deceased (including video consultation) within 28 days before death, or has viewed the body in person after death.

- When a medical practitioner who did not attend the deceased completes Cremation Form 4:
  - Q5. 'Usual medical practitioner?' Answer: 'No'. Provide details of your medical role in relation to the deceased and record at Q9 the date when the deceased was seen and a report of the record made by the attending doctor with their GMC number and name
  - Q6. 'How long attended deceased?' Answer: 'Not applicable'.
  - Q7. 'Time before death saw the deceased?' Answer: 'Not applicable'.
  - Q8. 'Date and time saw body?' Answer: 'Not applicable'.

This is helpfully summarised in the following flowchart:

**Completing a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death: process when the attending physician is not available**



\* Video/teleconference is acceptable    \*\* The body must be seen in person