

## § 32.1-283. Investigation of deaths; obtaining consent to removal of organs, etc.; fees.

A. Upon the death of any person from trauma, injury, violence, poisoning, accident, suicide or homicide, or suddenly when in apparent good health, or when unattended by a physician, or in jail, prison, other correctional institution or in police custody, or who is an individual receiving services in a state hospital or training center operated by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, or suddenly as an apparent result of fire, or in any suspicious, unusual or unnatural manner, or the sudden death of any infant the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner shall be notified by the physician in attendance, hospital, law-enforcement officer, funeral director, or any other person having knowledge of such death. Good faith efforts shall be made by any person or institution having initial custody of the dead body to identify and to notify the next of kin of the decedent. Notification shall include informing the person presumed to be the next of kin that he has a right to have identification of the decedent confirmed without due delay and without being held financially responsible for any procedures performed for the purpose of the identification. Identity of the next of kin, if determined, shall be provided to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner upon transfer of the dead body.

B. Upon being notified of a death as provided in subsection A, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner shall take charge of the dead body and the Chief Medical Examiner shall cause an investigation into the cause and manner of death to be made and a full report, which shall include written findings, to be prepared. In order to facilitate the investigation, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is authorized to inspect and copy the pertinent medical records of the decedent whose death is the subject of the investigation. Full directions as to the nature, character, and extent of the investigation to be made in such cases shall be furnished each medical examiner appointed pursuant to [§ 32.1-282](#) by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, together with appropriate forms for the required reports and instructions for their use. The facilities and personnel of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner shall be made available to any medical examiner investigating a death in accordance with this section. Reports and findings of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner shall be confidential and shall not under any circumstance be disclosed or made available for discovery pursuant to a court subpoena or otherwise, except as provided in this chapter. Nothing in this subsection shall prohibit the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner from releasing the cause or manner of death or prohibit disclosure of reports or findings to the parties in a criminal case.

C. A copy of each report pursuant to this section shall be delivered to the appropriate attorney for the Commonwealth and to the appropriate law-enforcement agency investigating the death. A copy of any such report regarding the death of a victim of a traffic accident shall be furnished upon request to the State Police and the Highway Safety Commission. In addition, a copy of any autopsy report concerning an individual receiving services in a state hospital or training center operated by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services shall be delivered to the Commissioner of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and to the State Inspector General. A copy of any

autopsy report concerning a prisoner committed to the custody of the Director of the Department of Corrections shall, upon request of the Director of the Department of Corrections, be delivered to the Director of the Department of Corrections. A copy of any autopsy report concerning a prisoner committed to any local correctional facility shall be delivered to the local sheriff or superintendent. Upon request, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner shall release such autopsy report to the decedent's attending physician and to the personal representative or executor of the decedent. At the discretion of the Chief Medical Examiner, an autopsy report may be released to the following persons in the following order of priority: (i) the spouse of the decedent, (ii) an adult son or daughter of the decedent, (iii) either parent of the decedent, (iv) an adult sibling of the decedent, (v) any other adult relative of the decedent in order of blood relationship, or (vi) any appropriate health facility quality assurance program.

D. For each investigation under this article, including the making of the required reports, the medical examiner appointed pursuant to § [32.1-282](#) shall receive a fee established by the Board within the limitations of appropriations for the purpose. Such fee shall be paid by the Commonwealth if the deceased is not a legal resident of the county or city in which his death occurred. In the event the deceased is a legal resident of the county or city in which his death occurred, such county or city shall be responsible for the fee up to \$20. If the deceased is an individual who receives services in a state hospital or training center operated by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the fee shall be paid by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

E. Nothing herein shall be construed to interfere with the autopsy procedure or with the routine obtaining of consent for removal of organs as conducted by surgical teams or others.

## § 32.1-27. Penalties, injunctions, civil penalties and charges for violations.

A. Any person willfully violating or refusing, failing or neglecting to comply with any regulation or order of the Board or Commissioner or any provision of this title shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor unless a different penalty is specified.

B. Any person violating or failing, neglecting, or refusing to obey any lawful regulation or order of the Board or Commissioner or any provision of this title may be compelled in a proceeding instituted in an appropriate court by the Board or Commissioner to obey such regulation, order or provision of this title and to comply therewith by injunction,

mandamus, or other appropriate remedy or, pursuant to § [32.1-27.1](#), imposition of a civil penalty or appointment of a receiver.

C. Without limiting the remedies which may be obtained in subsection B of this section, any person violating or failing, neglecting or refusing to obey any injunction, mandamus or other remedy obtained pursuant to subsection B shall be subject, in the discretion of the court, to a civil penalty not to exceed \$25,000 for each violation, which shall be paid to the general fund, except that civil penalties for environmental pollution shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Water Supply Assistance Grant Fund created pursuant to § [32.1-171.2](#). Each day of violation shall constitute a separate offense.

D. With the consent of any person who has violated or failed, neglected or refused to obey any regulation or order of the Board or Commissioner or any provision of this title, the Board may provide, in an order issued by the Board against such person, for the payment of civil charges for past violations in specific sums, not to exceed the limits specified in § [32.1-27.1](#) and subsection C of this section. Such civil charges shall be instead of any appropriate civil penalty which could be imposed under § [32.1-27.1](#) and subsection C of this section. When civil charges are based upon environmental pollution, the civil charges shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Water Supply Assistance Grant Fund created pursuant to § [32.1-171.2](#).

### 32.1-263. (Effective until January 1, 2020) Filing death certificates; medical certification; investigation by Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

A. A death certificate, including, if known, the social security number or control number issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles pursuant to § [46.2-342](#) of the deceased, shall be filed for each death that occurs in the Commonwealth. Non-electronically filed death certificates shall be filed with the registrar of any district in the Commonwealth within three days after such death and prior to final disposition or removal of the body from the Commonwealth. Electronically filed death certificates shall be filed with the State Registrar of Vital Records through the Electronic Death Registration System within three days after such death and prior to final disposition or removal of the body from the Commonwealth. Any death certificate shall be registered by such registrar if it has been completed and filed in accordance with the following requirements:

1. If the place of death is unknown, but the dead body is found in the Commonwealth, the death shall be registered in the Commonwealth and the place where the dead body is found shall be shown as the place of death. If the date of death is unknown, it shall be determined by approximation, taking into consideration all relevant information, including information provided by the immediate family regarding the date and time that the deceased was last seen alive, if the individual died in his home; and

2. When death occurs in a moving conveyance, in the United States of America and the body is first removed from the conveyance in the Commonwealth, the death shall be registered in the Commonwealth and the place where it is first removed shall be considered the place of death. When a death occurs on a moving conveyance while in international waters or air space or in a foreign country or its air space and the body is first removed from the conveyance in the Commonwealth, the death shall be registered in the Commonwealth but the certificate shall show the actual place of death insofar as can be determined.

B. The licensed funeral director, funeral service licensee, office of the state anatomical program, or next of kin as defined in § [54.1-2800](#) who first assumes custody of a dead body shall complete the certificate of death. He shall obtain personal data of the deceased necessary to complete the certificate of death, including the social security number of the deceased or control number issued to the deceased by the Department of Motor Vehicles pursuant to § [46.2-342](#), from the best qualified person or source available and obtain the medical certification from the person responsible therefor.

If a licensed funeral director, funeral service licensee, or representative of the office of the state anatomical program completes the certificate of death, he shall file the certificate of death with the State Registrar of Vital Records electronically using the Electronic Death Registration System and in accordance with the requirements of subsection A. If a member of the next of kin of the deceased completes the certificate of death, he shall file the certificate of death in accordance with the requirements of subsection A but shall not be required to file the certificate of death electronically.

C. The medical certification shall be completed, signed in black or dark blue ink, and returned to the funeral director within 24 hours after death by the physician in charge of the patient's care for the illness or condition which resulted in death except when inquiry or investigation by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required by § [32.1-283](#) or [32.1-285.1](#), or by the physician that pronounces death pursuant to § [54.1-2972](#). If the death occurred while under the care of a hospice provider, the medical certification shall be completed by the decedent's health care provider and filed electronically with the State Registrar of Vital Records using the Electronic Death Registration System for completion of the death certificate.

In the absence of such physician or with his approval, the certificate may be completed and signed by the following: (i) another physician employed or engaged by the same professional practice; (ii) a physician assistant supervised by such physician; (iii) a nurse practitioner practicing in accordance with the provisions of § [54.1-2957](#); (iv) the chief medical officer or medical director, or his designee, of the institution, hospice, or nursing home in which death occurred; (v) a physician specializing in the delivery of health care to hospitalized or emergency department patients who is employed by or engaged by the facility where the death occurred; (vi) the physician who performed an autopsy upon the decedent; (vii) an individual to whom the physician has delegated authority to complete and sign the certificate, if such individual has access to the medical history of the case and death is due to natural causes; or (viii) a physician licensed in another state who was in charge of the patient's care for the illness or condition that resulted in death.

D. When inquiry or investigation by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required by § [32.1-283](#) or [32.1-285.1](#), the Chief Medical Examiner shall cause an investigation of the cause of death to be made and the medical certification portion of the death certificate to be completed and signed within 24 hours after being notified of the death. If the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner refuses jurisdiction, the physician last furnishing medical care to the deceased shall prepare and sign the medical certification portion of the death certificate.

E. If the death is a natural death and a death certificate is being prepared pursuant to § [54.1-2972](#) and the physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant is uncertain about the cause of death, he shall use his best medical judgment to certify a reasonable cause of death or contact the health district physician director in the district where the death occurred to obtain guidance in reaching a determination as to a cause of death and document the same.

If the cause of death cannot be determined within 24 hours after death, the medical certification shall be completed as provided by regulations of the Board. The attending physician or the Chief Medical Examiner, an Assistant Chief Medical Examiner, or a medical examiner appointed pursuant to § [32.1-282](#) shall give the funeral director or person acting as such notice of the reason for the delay, and final disposition of the body shall not be made until authorized by the attending physician, the Chief Medical Examiner, an Assistant Chief Medical Examiner, or a medical examiner appointed pursuant to § [32.1-282](#).

F. A physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant who, in good faith, files or signs a certificate of death or determines the cause of death shall be immune from civil liability,

only for such signature and determination of causes of death on such certificate, absent gross negligence or willful misconduct.