

From: [DOH-LOFR \(DOH\)](#)
To: [Maxford Nelsen](#)
Cc: [JIC Director \(MIL\)](#); [Lead PIO \(MIL\)](#)
Subject: RE: Tracking COVID-19 deaths
Date: Friday, May 8, 2020 4:06:32 PM

Mr. Nelson – please find answers to your questions below.

1. From whom do we (DOH) receive COVID-19 death data and approximately what percentage of reports come from each (please include even minor and periodic sources)?

Death certificates are completed by funeral homes, medical certifiers, and local registrars in EDRS. Once all the information is completed in EDRS, the certificate is officially registered in our Washington Health and Life Events System (WHALES). We match names and dates of birth of lab positive cases from the Washington Disease Reporting System (WDRS) with decedents in the Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS), and, when present, in the Washington Health and Life Events System (WHALES). Death reports are also received from other states when WA residents die out of WA, but those have a time lag.

2. Will all COVID-19 deaths be included in EDRS? What is the approx. time delay between deaths being presented on the DOH COVID-19 dashboard and deaths being registered in EDRS?

Death certificates are completed by funeral homes, medical certifiers, and local registrars in EDRS based on the best medical information available at the time of certification. All COVID-19 deaths that occur in WA will be present in EDRS, but the certifier may not have COVID test results when create a record in EDRS.

The time lag between when a death shows up in EDRS and when it shows up on our website is generally a day.

3. What is the source of death counts reported on the DOH COVID-19 dashboard?

Deaths are reported initially through EDRS. These deaths are linked to positive COVID cases in WDRS through name and date of birth. Any individual who has a positive COVID-19 test and subsequently dies is counted on the dashboards.

4. As of today, approx., how many COVID-19 deaths have been recorded in EDRS? As of yesterday, we have identified 862 deaths to those testing positive for COVID-19 (see doh.wa.gov), and 828 are in EDRS. Please note that deaths only remain in EDRS for a limited period of time after the information is completed and registered in WHALES.

- a. How many listed COVID-19 as the “immediate cause of death” under the “Chain of Events – Etiology” section?
- b. How many listed COVID-19 as a “condition contributing to death”?
- c. How many listed “conditions contributing to death” other than COVID-19?
- d. Is there any reason that records of deaths registered via the EDRS would not be disclosable under the Public Records Act, Chapter 42.56 RCW, provided personally identifying information is redacted?

Of the 828 deaths in EDRS that directly link to individuals with a positive lab result, 681 list some variation of “COVID-19” in one of the causes of death. Please note that some deaths still have

“pending” causes of death. 50 deaths have some variation of “COVID-19” listed in the ‘Other significant conditions.’ There is some overlap, though, so, in total, 722 deaths currently mention COVID-19 on a cause of death or significant conditions line.

The Department of Health (Department) cannot provide vital records information under the Public Records Act because access and the release to vital records is governed by vital records law (chapter 70.58 RCW). The vital records law authorizes the release of vital records information in certified copies or data files. Under RCW 70.58.107, the legislature has provided that copies of vital records shall be charged \$20.

5. Were all of the deaths [attributed](#) to COVID-19 by DOH tested for and confirmed to have COVID-19? Under what circumstances would DOH list a COVID-19 death absent a confirmed test?

All of the deaths currently attributed to COVID-19 had a positive PCR test at some point.

A PCR test is required in order to classify something as a confirmed case. The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) recently wrote a position statement saying the probable cases should be reported as well. We hope to begin doing so this week. That reporting will be based off the CSTE case definition, which includes confirmed and probable cases:

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cste.org/resource/resmgr/2020ps/interim-20-id-01_covid-19.pdf

Thank you,

Liaison Officer

Unified Command – 2020 Novel CoV

Doh-lofr@doh.wa.gov

360-489-5910 (Katie Eilers) or 360-918-6156 (Chris Williams)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>

From: [Maxford Nelsen](#)
To: WAJIC@mil.wa.gov
Subject: Tracking COVID-19 deaths
Date: Monday, April 27, 2020 3:30:00 PM

To Whom it May Concern,

I initially attempted to contact Ms. Kristen Maki at the Department of Health, but was directed by her automatic out-of-office reply to direct inquiries to this email address.

I'm doing some research into the COVID-19 situation, specifically how deaths are recorded and measured in Washington state by the Department of Health, and need some assistance getting the following questions answered.

1. Can you confirm that DOH receives information about COVID-19 deaths from the following sources: (1) County/regional health departments, (2) coroners/medical examiners/prosecuting attorneys, and (3) acute care hospitals.
 - a. Do any of these sources *not* report COVID-19 deaths to DOH?
 - b. Are there other sources than these that *do* report COVID-19 deaths to DOH? If so, what are they?
2. Is it correct that all deaths in Washington state must be registered via the [Electronic Death Registration System \(EDRS\)](#)? If not, under what circumstances would a death be recorded in another manner?
3. Do the numbers of COVID-19 deaths [reported](#) by DOH derive from deaths registered via the EDRS? If not, under what circumstances would a COVID-19 death be reported to DOH in another manner?
4. As of today (or the most recent date for which data is available), how many COVID-19 related deaths been registered via the EDRS?
5. Of the COVID-19 related deaths registered via the EDRS:
 - a. How many listed COVID-19 as the "immediate cause of death" under the "Chain of Events – Etiology" section?
 - b. How many listed COVID-19 as a "condition contributing to death"?
 - c. How many listed "conditions contributing to death" other than COVID-19?
 - d. Is there any reason that records of deaths registered via the EDRS would not be disclosable under the Public Records Act, Chapter 42.56 RCW, provided personally identifying information is redacted?
6. Were all of the deaths [attributed](#) to COVID-19 by DOH tested for and confirmed to have COVID-19? Under what circumstances would DOH list a COVID-19 death absent a confirmed test?

If it would be more appropriate for me to correspond with someone else about this matter, would you please either (a) identify the individual(s) so I can reach out to them myself, or (2) forward my communication to them?

I appreciate your assistance in this matter.

Best,

Maxford Nelsen

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