

From: [Heather Thomas](#)
To: [Maxford Nelsen](#); [SHDInfo](#)
Subject: RE: Counting COVID-19 deaths
Date: Tuesday, June 23, 2020 12:48:13 PM

Maxford,

Apologies for the delay in reply, but here is the information we have on death data.

All death data provided are confirmed either through COVID test results done before or after a death. There could be underlying health conditions, but COVID-19 is still considered a contributing factor to the death. The Health District tracks numbers of COVID-related deaths from multiple sources. These include hospitals or healthcare facilities, other state or local health jurisdictions (for example, if a Snohomish County resident died at a King County hospital), the Snohomish County Medical Examiner's Office, or through case investigations.

The Health Officer and County Medical Examiner addressed this issue in one of our briefings. You can watch the video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_84HWQOn0 or read the transcript here: <https://www.snohd.org/DocumentCenter/View/3722/April-17-press-briefing-transcript?bidId=>

An example/question that came up during that briefing was whether someone who had COVID but died in a car accident would be counted as a COVID death. Here is the response from the Medical Examiner, which may help address your question: "There's nothing different about the certification of COVID-19 deaths specifically than any other type of infectious disease death. So the example about the person hit by a car, no, COVID would not go on the death certificate. And just to be clear, the medical examiner's office is not testing every death for COVID. We're using a rational approach and only testing people who we think may have it or may have died from it, but somebody who clearly dies of trauma, for example, we would not even test for it. So only the rational cause will go on the death certificate."

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From: Maxford Nelsen [mailto:MNelsen@freedomfoundation.com]
Sent: Tuesday, June 16, 2020 4:06 PM
To: SHDInfo <SHDInfo@snohd.org>
Subject: Counting COVID-19 deaths

SHD Staff,

I have a question regarding Snohomish County's method for counting COVID-19 deaths that I hope you can help me with. I've tried reaching out directly to SHD's media contact, Heather Thomas, via phone and email, but haven't received a response.

Specifically, what criteria does the county use when counting a death as related to COVID-19? I've so far identified two different methods used by various public health agencies in Washington.

The statewide COVID-19 fatality count publicized by the Washington Department of Health includes any person who tested positive for COVID-19 and subsequently died, even if the death certificate made no mention of COVID-19 as playing a role in the death.

However, I know some county health departments only count deaths of persons who tested positive for COVID-19 *and* died for reasons related to the virus. In [Thurston County](#), for instance, "[a]n individual is counted as a COVID-19 death if they were diagnosed with COVID-19 and died due to health complications related to the illness."

Which method does Snohomish County use? Or does it use a different method entirely?

Thanks in advance for your time.

Best,

Maxford Nelsen

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