Death certificate

[Eddie August Schneider](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_August_Schneider) (1911-1940) death certificate

The phrase **death certificate** can describe either a document issued by a medical practitioner certifying the deceased state of a person or popularly to a document issued by a person such as a registrar of [vital statistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vital_statistics_(government_records)) that declares the date, location and [cause](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cause_of_death) of a person's [death](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death) as later entered in an official register of deaths.

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Nature of a certificate

Each governmental jurisdiction prescribes the form of the document for use in its preview and the procedures necessary to legally produce it. One purpose of the certificate is to review the cause of death to determine if foul-play occurred it also can rule out an accidental death or a murder going by the findings and ruling of the medical examiner. It may also be required in order to arrange a burial or cremation, to provide [prima facie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prima_facia) evidence of the fact of death, which can be used to prove a person's will or to claim on a person's life insurance. Lastly, death certificates are used in [public health](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_health) to compile data on [leading causes of death](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_causes_of_death_by_rate) among other statistics (See: [Descriptive statistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Descriptive_statistics))

Before issuing a death certificate, the authorities usually require a certificate from a [physician](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physician) or [coroner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coroner) to validate the [cause of death](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cause_of_death) and the identity of the deceased. In cases where it is not completely clear that a person is dead (usually because their body is being sustained by [life support](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_support)), a [neurologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurologist) is often called in to verify [brain death](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brain_death) and to fill out the appropriate documentation. The failure of a physician to immediately submit the required form to the government (to trigger issuance of the death certificate) is often both a [crime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime) and cause for loss of one's license to practice. This is because of past scandals in which dead people continued to receive public benefits or voted in elections.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_certificate#cite_note-0) Death certificates may also be issued pursuant to a [court order](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_of_law) or an [executive order](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_(government)) in the case of individuals who have been declared [dead in absentia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_in_absentia). [Missing persons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missing_person) and victims of mass disasters (such as the sinking of the [*RMS Lusitania*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Lusitania)) may be issued death certificates in one of these manners.

In some jurisdictions, a [police officer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_officer) or a [paramedic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramedic) may be allowed to sign a death certificate under specific circumstances. This is usually when the cause of death seems obvious and no foul play is suspected, such as in extreme old age. In such cases, an [autopsy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autopsy) is rarely performed. This varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction; in some areas police officers may sign death certificates for victims of [SIDS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudden_infant_death_syndrome), but in others all deaths of individuals under 18 must be certified by a physician. Accident deaths where there is no chance of survival (decapitations, for instance) may be certified by police or paramedics, but autopsies are still commonly performed if there is any chance that alcohol or drugs played a role in the accident.