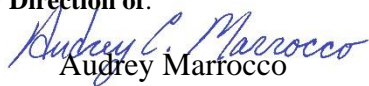


STATE REGISTRAR NOTICE

Subject: Reporting a Death of an Unidentified Decedent	Type: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regular <input type="checkbox"/> Transitory	Number: 2022-01
Date Issued: April 29, 2022	Audience: All Death Reporters	By Direction of:  Audrey Marrocco State Registrar

This State Registrar Notice is being issued to established guidance and requirements on reporting a death of an unidentified decedent¹. All deaths must be reported to the Bureau of Health Statistics and Registries within four days as required under the Vital Statistics Law (VSL).

[Referring a Death Case of an Unidentified Decedent](#)

Any death of an unidentified decedent shall be referred to the county coroner or medical examiner (coroner/ME) for investigation. If the coroner/ME is able to identify the decedent and locate next of kin to claim the body, then the personal information for the decedent shall be reported in accordance with [Death Certificate Registration Manual](#). If the coroner/ME is not able to identify the decedent, the coroner/ME investigating the case may report and affirm the personal information of an unidentified decedent as described in more detail in the next section.

[DNA Sampling of Unidentified Decedents](#)

The coroner/ME's office investigating the case shall submit a DNA sample to the Pennsylvania State Policy in accordance with Section 506.1 of the VSL.

[Reporting the Personal Information of an Unidentified Decedent](#)

While most personal information cannot be reported until the identity of an unidentified decedent is known, the following standards apply when originally reporting the death of an unidentified decedent:

Decedent's Information:

- Decedent's Legal Name²:
 - If the remains have been determined to be female, the name shall be recorded as "Jane" (first name) and "Doe" (last name)

¹ A dead body or fetal remains which have not been positively identified.

² By standardizing the names of unidentified decedents, the Department is able to more readily identify cases of unidentified decedents.

- If the remains have been determined to be male, the name shall be recorded as “John” (first name) and “Doe” (last name)
- If the sex of the remains for the decedent cannot be determined, the name shall be recorded as “Unknown” (first name) and “Doe” (last name)
- Gender shall be reported as the sex (female, male or unknown) of the decedent
- Social Security Number shall be reported as “unknown”
- Date of birth shall be reported as “999-99-9999” (which represents unknown)

Other Decedent Information:

Since the identity of the decedent is unknown, the following information shall be reported as unknown or left blank:

- Resident address
- Family members, including marital status, surviving spouse’s name, and name(s) of parent(s)
- Decedent attributes, including occupation, education, ancestry and race

Informant’s Information:

- Informant’s name shall be reported as the specific coroner/ME office that investigated the death.
- Informant’s address shall be reported as the address of the specific coroner/ME office that investigated the death.

Disposition and Funeral Director Information:

- Disposition information shall be reported in accordance with [Death Certificate Registration Manual](#).
- Funeral director information shall be reported in accordance with [Death Certificate Registration Manual](#).

The coroner/ME investigating the case may report and affirm the personal information of an unidentified decedent, or they may partner with a funeral director who may report the personal information for the case.

[Reporting the Medical Information of an Unidentified Decedent](#)

The medical certification for an unidentified decedent shall be completed by the coroner/ME in accordance with [SRN 2020-10, Medical Certification of a Report of Death](#).

[Amending the Death Record of an Unidentified Decedent](#)

The coroner/ME's office investigating the case may request an amendment against the case. See [SRN 2020-17, Amending Death Records](#) for additional guidance on how to request a medical amendment against a death record.

If the personal information on the case needs to be amended, the request to amend can be submitted by the informant using the [Request to Amend a Death Record](#).

Amending the Death Record to Report the Identity of the Decedent

As the informant on the case, the coroner/ME may submit a [Request to Amend a Death Record](#) when the identity of the decedent has been determined. The coroner/ME must provide documentary evidence to support the association between the unidentified decedent to the identity of a known individual. This documentary evidence may be provided through scientific test results (such as DNA or dental results that conclusively identify the remains to the individual), through a letter³ signed by the coroner/ME, or through a court decree that identifies the decedent as the known individual.

After learning of the identity of an unidentified decedent, coroners/MEs are encouraged to contact and work with next of kin to identify and include the decedent's actual date of birth, social security number, residency address, family members, and decedent attributes when submitting the [Request to Amend a Death Record](#).

Contact Information:

Vital Events Stakeholder Hotline
Phone: 800-323-9613

³ The letter shall be printed on the coroner/ME's office letterhead and include the following details: State File Number or EDRS case number, date of death, name as originally reported on the Report of Death for the decedent (i.e., Jane Doe, John Doe), legal name of the identified decedent, information on how the identity was determined (i.e., DNA testing), date the determination was made, and the name, title and signature of the coroner/ME.