

# VERIFICATION OF DEATH

Revised 1/11

## When Verifying Death Utilize The Following Criteria:

1. OBVIOUS DEATH injury/illness incompatible with life, and absent vital signs, including:
  - a. Decapitation
  - b. Explosive gunshot wound to the head.
  - c. Decomposition
  - d. Rigor Mortis
  - e. Lividity
  - f. BLUNT TRAUMATIC ARREST meeting all the following criteria:
    - i. Blunt mechanism only, with obvious trauma.
    - ii. No vital signs or other signs of life (movement, reactive pupils).
    - iii. Confirm with on-line medical control.

CAUTION: in cool environment, severely hypothermic patients may be cool, stiff, without vital signs, and in asystole or agonal rhythm.

When in doubt, attempt resuscitation and contact on-line Medical Control.

2. EXPECTED DEATH: patients without vital signs whose death from natural causes was expected and who have one of the following:
  - a. An EMS/DNR bracelet or declaration or POLST in accordance with Utah statute.
  - b. A DNR order (Medical Treatment Plan) signed by a physician and witnessed. Must verify with Medical Control.

CPR may be initiated until one of the above is verified, then may be discontinued.

All other patients should be considered potentially viable, including apparent deaths from natural causes and penetrating injuries. Begin appropriate resuscitation and contact Medical Control.

## Law Enforcement Concerns:

1. Limited Verification of Death. Absent carotid pulse, absent breathing, and meeting above criteria.
  - a. EMS personnel should Minimize contact with patient and avoid disturbing evidence when possible.
  - b. If in doubt, begin resuscitation and contact Medical Control. (Includes gunshot wounds or apparent suicides, which do not meet criteria for obvious death or expected death as above).
  - c. Document if denied access by law enforcement

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The emergency teams should attempt to get back in service as soon as possible. Notification of the Medical Examiner should be turned over to the Police as per Section 26-4-8 of the Utah Medical Examiner Act.

2. Transport of Bodies. At EMS agency discretion, Ambulance personnel may but are not required to transport a body after release by the investigating officer to:
  - a. Medical Examiner's office in M.E. cases.
  - b. Funeral home designated by family or Law Enforcement in cases not under M.E. jurisdiction.
  - c. Other appropriate facility as arranged by Law Enforcement.
3. Custody by medical examiner. 26-4-7 of the Utah Medical Examiner Act..

Upon notification under Section **26-4-8** or investigation by the medical examiner's office, the medical examiner shall assume custody of a deceased body if it appears that death was:

- a. by violence, gunshot, suicide, or accident unless the accident is a highway accident. If the death was from a highway accident, custody shall only be assumed if an autopsy is required or permitted under the provisions of Section **26-4-13** or if requested by the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction over the highway accident;
- b. sudden death while in apparent good health;
- c. unattended deaths, except that an autopsy may only be performed in accordance with the provisions of Subsection **26-4-9(3)**;
- d. under suspicious or unusual circumstances;
- e. resulting from poisoning or overdose of drugs;
- f. resulting from diseases that may constitute a threat to the public health;
- g. resulting from disease, injury, toxic effect, or unusual exertion incurred within the scope of the decedent's employment;
- h. due to sudden infant death syndrome;
- i. resulting while the decedent was in prison, jail, police custody, the state hospital, or in a detention or medical facility operated for the treatment of the mentally ill, emotionally disturbed, or delinquent persons;
- j. associated with diagnostic or therapeutic procedures; or
- k. described in this section when request is made to assume custody by a county or district attorney or law enforcement agency in connection with a potential homicide investigation or prosecution.