

ROD BURNS
Deputy Registrar General
NRS

(registrationcommunications@nrscotland.gov.uk)

URGENT – COVID-19 PANDEMIC: SPECIAL R LETTER (1)
March 26, 2020

Registrars, Registration Managers

Dear Registration colleagues

This is the first in a series of special R letters providing updated guidance on registration matters in light of the developing COVID-19 pandemic. It supplements the guidance on overall registration, and death and still-birth registration, issued by NRS on March 20, and the guidance on marriage and civil partnership issued on March 24. This guidance remains in place.

This special R letter covers:

1. The immediate commencement of remote death and still-birth registration, following commencement today of provisions in the UK emergency coronavirus bill
2. An update on FER
3. Further detail on reporting and recording of COVID-19, and on the selection of cases for review by the Death Certification Review Service (DCRS)
4. An update on the provision of birth guidance.

1. Remote Death and Still-Birth Registration

Following the granting of royal assent for the UK emergency coronavirus bill, and commencement by regulations today of provisions within it relating to remote death and still-birth registration in Scotland, we have now entered a period of remote registration.

Please begin making appointments to register deaths and still-births on a remote basis immediately, with a particular focus on responding to requests for appointments which have been postponed.

Except where additional advice is provided in this special R letter, and any subsequent special R letters, please follow the process guidance on registering deaths and still-births provided on March 20.

2. FER Update

Below is updated guidance on using the FER system. The main change to the guidance previously issued is that registrars should follow the registration process as far as “Get page for signing”. This will ensure that information gathered from the informant is saved to the FER database if there are any internet connectivity problems, or if an informant does not come back to the registrar before the session is “timed out” on FER.

Checking the Form of Particulars

- Read through the FoP to the informant and ensure that the information gathered is correct.
- Click ‘Get page for signing’ to go through validation, and address errors and warnings as needed.
- When only warnings are given, and you are happy you have dealt with the relevant warning, set ‘Validation option: display warnings?’ to No and click **‘Get page for signing’ again**, which assigns an entry number and creates a preliminary entry on the FER database.
- If you are dealing with the informant solely by telephone, print and check the generated register page.
- If the informant has an e-mail address or other electronic means of communication, you may print a register page and write by hand clearly across the top **“This page is for checking purposes only”**. That page may then be sent electronically to the informant for an additional check (see Annex 1).
- You can keep a session alive on FER by periodically generating preview pages, or by clicking ‘Get page for signing’ every 15 minutes, both of which send requests to the FER database (timeout occurs after 30 minutes of inactivity).
- If a FER session ‘times out’ before an informant gets back to you, or you experience internet issues, you should be able to recover the preliminary entry saved on the database earlier. In **‘Other Functions’**, go to **‘Recover incomplete registration’** or **‘MCCD Dashboard’** to find the entry.
- If you are still unable to retrieve information previously put in to FER, contact the NRS FER Support team **by e-mail** for assistance.

Collecting a signature for the register page

- If a sample page has been sent, once the informant is content that the information it contains is correct, ask them to sign the document and send it back to the office.

- If the information has been gathered solely by telephone, ask the informant what they usually sign (i.e. their full name spelled out, use of initials etc).
- It is important to know how the usual signature reads, as the registrar will be writing that signature on the register page. For example, does the son of the deceased sign James McGregor, Jamie McGregor, J McGregor and so on.
- Go to “Get page for signing”, print and check the register page.
- If content that the page is correct, go to “Transcribe signatures” and insert the informant’s signature, followed by “(Transcribed)” (see Annex 2).

If information for the entry gathered by one registrar but death register page is to be printed elsewhere

If council arrangements mean that the registrar who is completing the FoP will not be the registrar who is to sign the register entry, the registrar completing the FoP should follow the instructions above for completing and checking the FoP.

- Read through the FoP to the informant and ensure that the information gathered is correct.
- Click ‘Get page for signing’ to go through validation, and address errors and warnings as needed.
- When only warnings are given, and you are happy you have dealt with all of the relevant warnings, set ‘Validation option: display warnings?’ to No and click **‘Get page for signing’ again**, which assigns an entry number and creates a preliminary entry on the FER database.
- At the bottom of the screen there is the following message:
“If you RETURN TO MAIN MENU before you have received a valid register page (not a preview) this entry will not be saved. Tick this box to enable the RETURN TO MAIN MENU button”
- Tick the box to return to the main menu. This leaves an incomplete entry on the FER database.
- A registrar working in the office where the register page is to be printed and signed should then go in to **“Other Functions”**, then **‘Recover incomplete registration’**, or **‘MCCD Dashboard’** if the death was selected for review.
- After reading the entry through, click “Get page for signing” and print the register page to be signed, by adding the transcribed signature from the informant and the registrar’s signature.

3. Reporting and Recording of COVID-19, Selection of Cases for Review by DCRS

In a letter to certifying doctors and wider medical colleagues issued on March 24, 2020, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Registrar General provided guidance on a range of issues pertinent to the death certification process. Included amongst this guidance was advice

detailing new arrangements for the reporting of COVID-19. This had two key implications for registration practice:

- Replacing the information on reporting COVID-19 provided to you in the cover letter to the NRS guidance issued on March 20, CMO now advises that deaths due to COVID-19 disease or presumed- COVID-19 disease no longer need to be reported to the Procurator Fiscal
- Secondly, causes of death listed as 'presumed-COVID-19 disease' are an acceptable cause of death, and do not need to be queried.

As previously advised, please record any death due to COVID-19 showing the full term Coronavirus 2019 in the death register.

In addition, there have been changes to the system of review of cases by DCRS established in 2015. During the initial period of the pandemic it was agreed that the sample size for cases selected by NRS for cases forwarded to DCRS for review would be reduced from 10% to 4%. It has now been decided that sampling of cases will be suspended until further notice, by Ministerial Direction, at 2 o'clock today. As of 14.00, therefore, there will no longer be any need to provide informants with information about the death certification review service, advance registration or any other aspect of the process for selecting cases for medical review, and death registration can proceed without reference to these elements of the 2015 system. As soon as we receive word that the suspension of case selection is to end, we will alert you immediately.

4. Issue of Guidance on the Registration of Births

As outlined in the overall registration guidance of March 20, in order to focus on core provision of death and still-birth registrations as a priority, we propose to postpone birth registrations in the meantime. (Similarly, the guidance of March 24 confirmed that no work was to be undertaken on marriages or civil partnerships until further notice.)

We will keep this under review. In order to ensure that customers are not disadvantaged by the postponement of birth registration, we are working with UK government departments to develop an acceptable means of verifying Scottish births without their being registered. This should allow the initiation of various benefit claims which ordinarily rely on verified NRS data flowing from a completed birth registration. This work is still in progress, and we will issue the formal guidance on birth registration as soon as it is complete.

In the interim, please assure new parents calling to book an appointment to register a birth that while we are postponing the registration of their birth during the pandemic situation, we will pick up the postponed birth registrations as soon as we have information that in-person attendance at an appointment is permissible.

Please direct queries on all aspects of registration covered in this special R letter to: registrationcommunications@nrscotland.gov.uk.

ROD BURNS
Deputy Registrar General