



Washington State Death Data 2025

DATA USERS' GUIDE

Washington State Department of Health
Center for Health Statistics

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Contents

OVERVIEW OF 2025 DEATHS	4
DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING	6
OVERVIEW	6
DEMOGRAPHIC FIELDS	8
MEDICAL FIELDS	9
EFFECT OF TRANSITION TO WHALES	10
Change in variable names	10
Names of Funeral Homes, Disposition Facilities, and Place of Death Facility Names	10
Variables no longer in data set	11
RELEASE OF DEATH DATA FILES	14
Differences in file types	14
Data format and release schedule	24
Discontinuation of Opioid File	25
Notes on 2025 Death Data Quality	25
MORE ON SELECT ANALYTIC VARIABLES	26
Variables with known data quality issues	26
Pregnancy status	26

Geography	28
Non-specific causes of death	29
Missing/out of range values for out of state deaths	29
Missing/out of range values for in state deaths	29
Race and Ethnicity	30
Cause of death	33
Place of residence and occurrence	35
CONTACT US	39

Washington State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics (CHS) is responsible for the collection, data quality assurance, and dissemination of preliminary and final vital statistics data in Washington State. Center for Health Statistics is the only entity with authority to release vital statistics data files.

Please do not share these data files with other agencies or members of the public.

Important Note:

A new vital records law *RCW 70.58A* that went into effect on January 1, 2021 that changed the requirements for requesting vital records data. The new law authorizes the release of death data by signing a data sharing agreement (DSA).

All data customers who wish to purchase any WA Death datasets will need to have a DSA in place with the Department of Health (DOH) before they are able to purchase death data. For more information please visit our website *DOH Death Website*, along with the *Data Request FAQ webpage*. You can also email *CHS.DataRequests@doh.wa.gov*.

The purpose of the current document is to provide death data users with an overview of the following topics:

- The collection and processing of death data in Washington State,
- The impact of transitioning our electronic death registration system (EDRS) to our new registration system (WHALES),
- Known data quality issues that we are in the process of addressing,
- Notes on how key variables in the data set are derived.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email doh.information@doh.wa.gov.

This technical document is also available as a web-based (html) document <https://doh.wa.gov/data-and-statistical-reports/health-statistics/death>.

OVERVIEW OF 2025 DEATHS

In 2025, there were 67,443 deaths including those that occurred in Washington State (regardless of decedents' state of residence) and Washington State residents who died out of state. The distribution of deaths is as follows:

- 65,928 total deaths among Washington residents:
 - 64,458 WA resident deaths occurred in state
 - 1,470 WA resident deaths occurred out of state
- 1,515 deaths among out of state residents occurred in Washington State

Table 1. Numbers of deaths by residence and state of occurrence

Year	WA residents who died in state	WA residents who died out of state	Total WA resident deaths*	Non-WA residents who died in state	Total of all deaths**
2019	56861	1436	58297	1378	59697
2020	61738	1439	63177	1292	64469
2021	67031	1723	68754	1701	70455
2022	67613	1501	69114	1590	70704
2023	64457	1611	66068	1445	67513
2024	64191	1508	65699	1442	67141
2025	64458	1470	65928	1515	67443

*Includes WA residents who died in state and out of state. **Includes all deaths occurring in state and deaths to Washington residents occurring outside Washington state.

As required by our agreement with NCHS, the death data files do not include information on where the death or injury occurred for Washington State residents who died out of state. However, we do include deaths occurring in Washington State out of state residents.

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

OVERVIEW

Typically, when a person dies of natural causes, the death registration process begins when a family member, friend, or staff person at a healthcare or long term care facility informs a funeral home of the death. The funeral home collects the information listed in the next tab. The funeral home communicates this information to the decedent's health care provider through the Washington Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS). The health care provider, medical examiner, or coroner uses information in the decedent's medical record and death scene investigation reports (if applicable) to submit the information requested on the medical portion or Part II of the death certificate including the cause of death.

According to Washington State law (RCW 70.58A.200) deaths must be registered within 5 calendar days after the occurrence of death is known.

The EDRS web-based portal funnels death registration data into our data management system known as Washington Health And Life Events System (WHALES). CHS began using WHALES in 2017 after retiring the legacy system known as Bedrock. Beginning with 2016 death data, we have produced death data files for analysis from WHALES. The front end data collection in EDRS was available through February 7, 2024. After February 7, 2024, deaths were entered directly into WHALES. Note to DOH and Local Health Jurisdiction users: this change in data systems does not affect CHAT users.

Once a death is registered, the information is sent by DOH Center for Health Statistics (CHS) to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) for

coding including the text fields capturing the cause of death (see Figure 2). NCHS returns the coded medical information (ICD 10 codes) to CHS within a few days of receiving the cause of death text/literals and injury information.

CHS performs routine data quality checks on an ongoing basis, especially after the close of a given calendar year as we approach the deadline for submitting the annual file to NCHS and to data users.

DEMOGRAPHIC FIELDS

Figure 1. Death certificate fields - Part 1

Washington State Death Worksheet Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS)											
*Required Information											
*First Name			Middle Name			*Last Name			Suffix		
*Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Unknown		*County of Death			*Date of Death How Determined ☐ Actual ☐ Found		Time of Death How Determined ☐ Actual ☐ Found				
*Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY) ☐ Unknown			*Reported Age ☐ Unknown O 1 Year or more _____ Years O Less than 1 Year _____ Months _____ Days _____ Hours _____ Minutes								
*Social Security Number ☐ Reason Not Available ☐ None ☐ Unknown ☐ Not Obtainable			*Any Aliases?			First Name		Middle Name		Last Name	
*Hispanic Ethnicity ☐ Unknown O Sought, but Unknown, O Refused, O Not obtainable O No Response O No, Not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino O Yes (Choose all that apply) ☐ Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano ☐ Puerto Rican ☐ Cuban ☐ Other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino _____			*Race ☐ Unknown O Sought, but Unknown, O Refused, O Not obtainable (Choose all that apply) ☐ White ☐ Black or African American ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native _____ ☐ Asian Indian ☐ Chinese ☐ Filipino ☐ Japanese ☐ Korean ☐ Vietnamese ☐ Other Asian _____ ☐ Native Hawaiian ☐ Guamanian or Chamorro ☐ Samoan ☐ Other Pacific Islander Other _____								
*Place of Birth ☐ Birth Place Unknown		Country		State		County		City			
*Place of Residence		Country		Street		Unit		City		State Zip County	
*Estimate Length of Time at Residence O 1 Year or more _____ Years O Less than 1 Year _____ Months _____ Days _____ O Unknown				*Inside City Limits? O No Response O Yes O No O Unknown		Reside on Tribal Reservation? O No Response O Yes _____ O No O Unknown					
*Education ☐ 8 th grade or less (Specify) _____ ☐ 9 th -12 th grade; no diploma ☐ High school graduate or GED completed ☐ Some college credit, but no degree ☐ Associate degree (e.g., AA, AS) ☐ Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, AB, BS) ☐ Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEng, Med, MSW, MBA) ☐ Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD or Professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD))				*Usual Occupation (DO NOT enter RETIRED) *Business/Industry (DO NOT use COMPANY NAME)							
*Was Decedent ever in U.S. Armed Forces? O No Response O Yes O No O Unknown				*Marital Status at Time of Death ☐ Never Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Unknown ☐ Married ☐ Widowed ☐ Domestic Partner ☐ Separated Surviving Spouse or Domestic Partner Name (give name prior to first marriage)							
*Parent's Names Father's First Name			Middle Name			Last Name			Suffix		
Mother's First Name			Middle Name			Last Name (prior to first marriage)					
*Informant's Name			Relationship to Decedent			Address (Street, City, State, Zip, [Country if not United State])					
*Where did death occur? O No Response O Hospital _____ Location in Hospital ☐ Inpatient ☐ Emergency Room/Outpatient ☐ Dead on Arrival				O Other Facility Name or Location ☐ Hospice Facility ☐ Nursing Home/Long Term Care Facility ☐ Decedent Home ☐ Other (Specify) _____ City Zip							
Funeral Home Handling Case								Was ME/Coroner Informed? O Yes O No			
*Disposition ☐ Burial ☐ Cremation ☐ Removal from State ☐ Donation ☐ Entombment ☐ Body not Recovered ☐ Other (Specify)				Date of Disposition ☐ Unknown Month Day Year (YYYY)				Place of Final Disposition (Name of cemetery, crematory, other place)			
Country			State		City						

DOH/CHS 406 3/10/11

MEDICAL FIELDS

Figure 2. Death certificate fields - Part 2

Part 2: Completed by Medical Certifier					
Manner of Death ☐ Natural ☐ Accident ☐ Suicide ☐ Homicide ☐ Undetermined ☐ Pending		Time of Death (24 hours) _____ How Determined ☐ Actual ☐ Presumed/Estimated ☐ Court Appointed ☐ Found		Autopsy? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown Were autopsy findings available to complete the cause of death? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Did tobacco use contribute to death? ☐ Yes ☐ Probably ☐ No ☐ Unknown		If female: ☐ Not pregnant, but pregnant within 42 days before death ☐ Not pregnant within past year ☐ Not pregnant, but pregnant 43 days to 1 year before death ☐ Pregnant at time of death ☐ Unknown if pregnant within the past year			
Cause of Death					
Enter the chain of events – diseases, injuries, or complications – that directly caused the death. DO NOT enter terminal events such as cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, or ventricular fibrillation without showing etiology. DO NOT ABBREVIATE. Add additional lines if necessary.					
IMMEDIATE CAUSE (Final disease or condition resulting in death)		A. _____		Interval between Onset & Death	
Sequentially list conditions, if any, leading to the cause listed on line A. Enter the UNDERLYING CAUSE (disease or injury that initiated the events resulting in death) LAST.		B. _____		Interval between Onset & Death	
		C. _____		Interval between Onset & Death	
		D. _____		Interval between Onset & Death	
Other significant conditions contributing to death but not resulting in the underlying cause given above.					
Date of Injury (mm/dd/yyyy) _____ Time of Injury (24 hours) _____		How Determined: Actual ☐ Presumed/Est ☐ Court Appointed ☐ Found ☐		Place of injury _____	
Location of Injury: Number & Street _____		Apt No _____ City/Town _____		State _____ Zip+4 _____ County _____	
Describe how injury occurred. _____		Injury at Work? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown		If transportation injury ☐ Driver/Operator ☐ Pedestrian ☐ Passenger ☐ Other _____	
Certifying Physician To the best of my knowledge, death occurred at the time, date, and place and due to the cause(s) and manner stated. X		Medical Examiner/Coroner On the basis of examination, and/or investigation, in my opinion, death occurred at the time, date, and place, and due to the cause(s) and manner stated. X			
Name and Address of Certifier – Physician, Medical Examiner or Coroner (Type or Print) _____					Date Signed _____
Name and Title of Attending Physician if other than Certifier (Type or Print) _____					
Title of Certifier _____	License Number _____	ME/Coroner File Number _____	Was case referred to the ME/Coroner? ☐ Yes ☐ No		

EFFECT OF TRANSITION TO WHALES

We have listed the main impacts of our transition in 2016 from our legacy system to the current Washington Health And Life Events System (WHALES).

Change in variable names

The most significant impact for data users using statistical software (SAS, Stata, etc.) to analyze death data for 2016 onward is that variable names for most data fields have changed starting with the 2016 death file. As the new variable names will not match those in death files for 2015 or older data any programs written to conduct analysis with pre-2016 data files will not work with files produced for 2016 and later. For example, the variable “cnty_res” in the pre-2016 format appears as “Residence County FIPS Code” in the new (2016 and later) format.

To assist with the transition we have created two resources to help data users. The first is a cross walk that displays old variable names and values and the corresponding new variable names and values. The second tool is a Stata do file that converts new (WHALES) variable names to the old ones. The do file (named “DthStatFile_ConvertToOldVarNames.do”) is available to data users with the death data set on our Secure Access Washington CHS Data Files site. The *Death Statistical Data Dictionary and Crosswalks* includes both current and historical field names, formats and labels.

Names of Funeral Homes, Disposition Facilities, and Place of Death Facility Names

In death files for 2017 and later, the variables for funeral home, and disposition facilities will appear as literals and codes for both funeral homes and disposition facilities. CHS has traditionally provided a crosswalk between funeral home codes and names. Starting with the 2024 dataset, this will be discontinued, as the information is already contained in the data files. In addition, place of death facility names have been added to the dataset. The place of death facility codes will no longer be updated for 2024 and later, following the transition to the new death registration system in February 2024.

Variables no longer in data set

The following variables will not be present in the death data sets beginning with the 2016 data. Some of these variables have not been in use for several years but remained in previous annual releases of death data as place holders to preserve the layout of the data sets. Other variables appear as literal fields in 2016 and later death files compared with codes in pre-2016 files.

Table 2. Variables dropped from death data beginning with 2016 data files

Old Variable Name	Description	Notes
citizen	Citizenship status	Discontinued in 1992.
contrib	Contributory cause of death	Discontinued in 1989.
emergent	Emergency care code indicating whether emergency care was given.	Discontinued in 1988.
funeralc	Funeral home code	Use funeralc for pre-2016 death files. Use “Funeral_Home_Name” for deaths in 2016 and later. This is a field with the literal name of the funeral home rather than codes.
hs_grad	High school graduation status	Discontinued in 1992. Use “educ” (for pre-2016) and “Education” (for 2016 and later)
ind_fed	Federal industry code	Discontinued in 2010.

(continued)

Old Variable Name	Description	Notes
injplace	Place external injury occurred	Discontinued since 2012. Use “injpchs” (pre-2016) or “Injury_ACME_Place” (for 2016 and later.)
nchsnew	NCHS new record flag indicating records added since annual cutoff date.	Discontinued in 2000.
occ_fed	Federal occupation code	Discontinued in 2010.
resunit	Length of residence unit type	Discontinued in 2004 and replaced with res_lena (pre-2016 files). Use “Residence_Length_Units” for deaths in 2016 and later.
resunum	Length of residence, number of units	Discontinued in 2004 – replaced by res_auni (pre-2016) and “Residence_Length” (for deaths in 2016 and later.)
smoking	Smoking status in 15 years prior to death	Discontinued in 2004. Use “tbcontri” (pre-2016) and “Tobacco” (for 2016 deaths and later.)
transax	TRANSAX conversion flag indicating alternation of literal codes	Discontinued in 1999

(continued)

Old Variable Name	Description	Notes
Occupation Milham	Usual Occupation - Milham's Code	Discontinued in 2019
Res Tribal Reservation Code	Decedent's Residence Tribal Reservation Code	Discontinued in 2020
Death County City WA Code	Death Location WA County City Code	Discontinued in 2022 - Replaced by Death City FIPS Code
Death County WA Code	Death Location WA County Code	Discontinued in 2022 - Replaced by Death County FIPS Code
Bridge Race	Decedent's NCHS Bridged Race	Discontinued in 2022 - Use Race Summary Code
Race Calculation	Decedent's Race Caluclation	Discontinued in 2022 - Use Race Summary Code
Residence County City WA Code	Decedent's Residence County City Code	Discontinued in 2022
Residence County WA Code	Decedent's Residence County Code	Discontinued in 2022
Injury County City WA Code	Place of Injury County City WA Code	Discontinued in 2022 - Replaced by Injury City FIPS Code
Injury County WA Code	Place of Injury County WA Code	Discontinued in 2022 - Replaced by Injury County FIPS Code

RELEASE OF DEATH DATA FILES

This section provides information on the various standard death files we release along with details of the data format and general release schedule.

Differences in file types

CHS releases different versions of the death data including Death Statistical, Cause of Death Literals, Geocode, and Names Files. The data files cover the same period but differ in the variables and decedent population they include.

The table below indicates with an ‘X’ the variables that are present in each death file.

Table 3. Death files compared

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
State File Number	X	X	X	X
Social Security Number			X	
Decedent Last Name			X	
Decedent First Name			X	
Decedent Middle Name			X	
Decedent Suffix			X	
Sex	X		X	

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
Age Type	X		X	
Age	X		X	
Age Years	X			
Date of Birth	X		X	
Date of Birth - Month	X		X	
Date of Birth - Day	X		X	
Date of Birth - Year	X		X	
Date of Death	X		X	
Date of Death - Month	X		X	
Date of Death - Day	X		X	
Date of Death - Year	X		X	
Date of Death Modifier	X			
Time of Death - Hour	X			
Time of Death - Minutes	X			
Time of Death Modifier	X			
Birthplace State FIPS Code	X			
Birthplace Country	X			
Death City	X			
Death County	X		X	
Death City FIPS Code	X			
Death County FIPS Code	X			
Death State	X			
Death Zip Code	X			
Place of Death Type	X			
Death Facility	X			
Death Facility Name	X			
Armed Forces	X			
Marital Status	X			
Education	X			
Education 8 or Less	X			

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
Occupation	X			
Industry	X			
Informant Relationship	X			
Race White	X			
Race Black	X			
Race Amer Indian Alaskan	X			
Race Asian Indian	X			
Race Chinese	X			
Race Filipino	X			
Race Japanese	X			
Race Korean	X			
Race Vietnamese	X			
Race Other Asian	X			
Race Hawaiian	X			
Race Guamanian or Chamorro	X			
Race Samoan	X			
Race Other Pacific Islander	X			
Race Other	X			
Race Tribe First	X			
Race Tribe Second	X			
Race Other Asian First	X			
Race Other Asian Second	X			
Race Other PI First	X			
Race Other PI Second	X			
Race Other First	X			
Race Other Second	X			
Race Summary Code	X			
Hispanic No	X			
Hispanic Mexican	X			
Hispanic Puerto Rican	X			

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
Hispanic Cuban	X			
Hispanic Other	X			
Hispanic NCHS Bridge	X			
Residence City Street			X	
Residence City	X		X	
Residence City FIPS Code	X			
Residence City Limits	X			
Residence County	X		X	
Residence City FIPS Code	X			X
Residence County FIPS Code	X			
Residence State			X	
Residence State FIPS Code	X			
Residence Zip Code	X		X	X
Res Geo Source				X
Res Geo Match Score				X
Residence Latitude				X
Residence Longitude				X
Res Geo School District				X
Res Geo Census Tract 2010				X
Res Geo Census Block Grp 2010				X
Res Geo Census Block 2010				X
Res Geo ZCTA 2010				X
Res Geo Census Tract 2020				X
Res Geo Census Block Grp 2020				X
Res Geo Census Block 2020				X
Res Geo ZCTA 2020				X
Residence Length Units	X			
Residence Length	X			
Funeral Home Name	X			
Disposition	X			

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
Disposition Date	X			
Disposition Date - Month	X			
Disposition Date - Day	X			
Disposition Date - Year	X			
Disposition Place Name	X			
Certifier Designation	X			
ME Coroner Referred	X			
Cause of Death Line A		X		
Cause of Death Line B		X		
Cause of Death Line C		X		
Cause of Death Line D		X		
Interval Line A		X		
Interval Line B		X		
Interval Line C		X		
Interval Line D		X		
Conditions Part II		X		
ACME Line 1	X			
ACME Line 2	X			
ACME Line 3	X			
ACME Line 4	X			
ACME Line 5	X			
ACME Line 6	X			
ACME Line 7	X			
ACME Line 8	X			
ACME Line 9	X			
ACME Line 10	X			
ACME Line 11	X			
ACME Line 12	X			
ACME Line 13	X			
ACME Line 14	X			

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
ACME Line 15	X			
ACME Line 16	X			
ACME Line 17	X			
ACME Line 18	X			
ACME Line 19	X			
ACME Line 20	X			
ACME Sequence 1	X			
ACME Sequence 2	X			
ACME Sequence 3	X			
ACME Sequence 4	X			
ACME Sequence 5	X			
ACME Sequence 6	X			
ACME Sequence 7	X			
ACME Sequence 8	X			
ACME Sequence 9	X			
ACME Sequence 10	X			
ACME Sequence 11	X			
ACME Sequence 12	X			
ACME Sequence 13	X			
ACME Sequence 14	X			
ACME Sequence 15	X			
ACME Sequence 16	X			
ACME Sequence 17	X			
ACME Sequence 18	X			
ACME Sequence 19	X			
ACME Sequence 20	X			
ACME Cause Category 1	X			
ACME Cause Category 2	X			
ACME Cause Category 3	X			
ACME Cause Category 4	X			

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
ACME Cause Category 5	X			
ACME Cause Category 6	X			
ACME Cause Category 7	X			
ACME Cause Category 8	X			
ACME Cause Category 9	X			
ACME Cause Category 10	X			
ACME Cause Category 11	X			
ACME Cause Category 12	X			
ACME Cause Category 13	X			
ACME Cause Category 14	X			
ACME Cause Category 15	X			
ACME Cause Category 16	X			
ACME Cause Category 17	X			
ACME Cause Category 18	X			
ACME Cause Category 19	X			
ACME Cause Category 20	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 1	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 2	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 3	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 4	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 5	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 6	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 7	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 8	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 9	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 10	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 11	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 12	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 13	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 14	X			

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 15	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 16	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 17	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 18	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 19	X			
ACME Nature of Injury Flag 20	X			
Underlying COD Code	X		X	
Record Axis Code 1	X			
Record Axis Code 2	X			
Record Axis Code 3	X			
Record Axis Code 4	X			
Record Axis Code 5	X			
Record Axis Code 6	X			
Record Axis Code 7	X			
Record Axis Code 8	X			
Record Axis Code 9	X			
Record Axis Code 10	X			
Record Axis Code 11	X			
Record Axis Code 12	X			
Record Axis Code 13	X			
Record Axis Code 14	X			
Record Axis Code 15	X			
Record Axis Code 16	X			
Record Axis Code 17	X			
Record Axis Code 18	X			
Record Axis Code 19	X			
Record Axis Code 20	X			
Autopsy	X			
Autopsy Available	X			
Pregnancy	X			

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
Tobacco	X			
Manner	X			
Injury Description		X		
Date of Injury	X			
Date of Injury - Month	X			
Date of Injury - Day	X			
Date of Injury - Year	X			
Injury Date Modifier	X			
Time of Injury - Hour	X			
Time of Injury - Minutes	X			
Time of Injury Modifier	X			
Injury Place	X	X		
Injury ACME Place	X			
Injury City	X			
Injury City FIPS Code	X			
Injury County FIPS Code	X			
Injury County	X			
Injury State	X			
Injury Zip Code	X			
Injury at Work	X			
Injury Transportation	X			
Date Received	X			
Local File Number	X			
Funeral Home Code	X			
Disposition Facility Code	X			
Drug All	X			
Opioid	X			
Heroin	X			
Natural Semisynthetic Opioid	X			
Methadone	X			

(continued)

Field Name	Statistical	Cause of Death Literals	Names	Geocode
Synthetic Opioid	X			
Cocaine	X			
Prescription Opioid	X			
Psychostimulant	X			
Suicide All	X			
Suicide firearm	X			
Suicide Asphyxia	X			
Suicide Poisoning	X			
Suicide Other	X			
Firearm All	X			
Firearm Unintentional	X			
Firearm Homicide	X			
Firearm Undetermined	X			
Firearm Suicide	X			
Firearm Legal	X			
Malignant Neoplasm	X			
Heart Disease	X			
Alzheimers	X			
Unintentional Injury	X			
Chronic Lower Respiratory	X			
Cerebrovascular Disease	X			
Diabetes	X			
Chronic Liver Disease	X			
Influenza Pneumonia	X			
Parkinsons	X			
Essential Hypertension	X			
Pneumonitis	X			

Data format and release schedule

CHS will continue to release final death data files annually in comma delimited format and Microsoft Excel format (for Statistical, Standard, Cause of Death Literals, Death Names, and Geocode files).

Final data files for a given year will be released approximately nine to ten months after the end of the calendar year. Files will be provided on the DOH Y:Drive for DOH assessment staff and uploaded to CHS Data Files (accessed via Secure Access Washington) for local health assessment staff.

Please note that vital records data are not subject to public records requests, and cannot be released without a fully executed data sharing agreement

The files will also be available for order to the general public at <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Data-and-Statistical-Reports/Health-Statistics/Death>.

CHS will also release provisional death data files on a quarterly basis within two weeks of the close of the calendar quarter.

Please note that certain variables in preliminary death data sets will have missing or incomplete information as we await additional information from medical certifiers. These fields include cause of death, manner, and injury information, which likely involves deaths not due to natural causes. It may take 3 or more months to obtain complete manner, cause of death, and injury information for suicides, homicides, accidents, and deaths of undetermined intent. The delay is due to the time required for toxicology tests, autopsies, and the collection of additional information from various sources such as law enforcement reports (if applicable) by medical examiners and coroners.

Table 4. File release schedule

Type of file	Annual	Quarterly
Status	Final	Preliminary
Release date*	October of calendar year following death year	First 2 weeks of the month following the calendar quarter

*Release timeframes listed are approximate

Discontinuation of Opioid File

We have discontinued the production of Washington State Opioid Death file as created for 1995-2015 deaths. We have created a number of opioid overdose death flags in the statistical death files beginning in 2017 that are consistent with definitions created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Data users can find additional information about these and other disease flags in section 8 of this guide.

Notes on 2025 Death Data Quality

The 2025 deaths that have occurred outside of Washington State may be missing ICD10 codes, manner of death, cause of death, race information, injury information, and other additional fields due to different State privacy laws. As such, information for out of state deaths will have a higher number of unknowns.

For out of state 2025 deaths, the mortality team followed up with other states to request missing underlying cause of death ICD-10 codes. Out of 179 records missing the underlying cause of death code, 177 were obtained.

The mortality team launched a new, electronic cause-of-death querying process in Summer 2025 to capture additional information about non-specific causes of death. Before this upgrade, this process required hundreds of hours generating and mailing thousands of paper letters to medical certifiers. This streamlined process generates secure emails via R and REDCap to medical certifiers in a few minutes with a custom survey link. This survey is tailored to the specific ill-defined condition reported on the death certificate and provides multiple-choice options for likely underlying diseases or conditions. The response rate from mail-based to REDCap from medical certifiers has increased from 45% to 70%.

MORE ON SELECT ANALYTIC VARIABLES

In this section we list details on key analytic variables including how they are derived and recommendations for their use in analysis. We also alert data users to known data quality issues.

Variables with known data quality issues

We are aware of the following data issues and we are working to address them as noted. DOH and local health jurisdiction users: please note that these issues do not affect the use of CHAT. These issues are only relevant to data users who intend to analyze death data in statistical software such as SAS or Stata. In addition to the issues listed below, we are continuing to examine other data issues and will provide updates as needed. We welcome feedback from all data users if you identify a data issue not mentioned below.

Pregnancy status

In death files for 2015 and earlier, men and women outside the expected age range for pregnancy (10 to 55 years) were coded as “8” indicating that the question is “not applicable.” In the new coding schema for data files for 2016 and beyond, all men and women outside the expected age range (below 10 years and above 55 years) should be coded as blank (”.”) to indicate that the question is not applicable. Due to a data conversion problem in the 2016 death file the pregnancy variable is blank (i.e. “not applicable”) for some

women within the expected age range when they should have been coded as “8” (“no response”). CHS has made changes to WHALES to code these situations to “8” beginning with the 2017 annual data file.

Recommendation: To maintain consistency between the released 2016 death files and those issued for 2017 and later, please recode the blanks for women in the appropriate age range to “8” in 2016 in accordance with coding scheme below (for 2016 and later).

Table 5. Change in coding scheme for pregnancy status variable

2016 onwards			2015 and prior		
Variable name/ Format	Values	Value labels	Variable name/ Format	Values	Value labels
Pregnancy 1; Numeric	1	Not pregnant within the past year	pregstat	0	Pregnancy status missing
	2	Pregnant at the time of death		1	Not pregnant within 1 year
	3	Not pregnant, but pregnant within 42 days of death	1; Character	2	Pregnant at death
	4	Not pregnant, but pregnant 43 days to 1 year before death		3	Not pregnant, but pregnant within 42 days of death
	8	No response		4	Not pregnant, but pregnant 43 days to 1 year before death
	9	Unknown if pregnant within the past year		8	Not applicable
	Blank	Not applicable		9	Unknown

Geography

For some records, variables showing residence or occurrence county and city codes in 2016 and beyond show values of a series of ‘9’s. Records for Washington State residents who died in state with ‘9’s in the county and/or city fields may indicate that the individual was homeless or transient. These records used to be coded as a series of ‘0’s in 2015 and earlier.

Out of state residents who died in Washington State or Washington State residents who died out of state may also have city and county codes that are coded with '9's when the residence or occurrence geography is not known.

Non-specific causes of death

When death certificates are registered with vague cause of death statements, CHS staff will follow up with the medical provider on record to obtain further details. There are approximately 700 ICD10 codes for non-specific causes of death that require follow up from CHS. Sometimes, this process will result in additional information being added to the cause of death statement that may change the underlying cause of death. Towards the end of 2016, as CHS prepared to switch over to WHALES, we were unable to conduct this follow up or “queries” on death certificates with nonspecific causes of death. Examples of causes of death that were not queried in 2016 due to the transition include “congestive heart failure”, “systolic heart failure”, “senile dementia” (with no additional specifics), “metastatic carcinoma”, “leukemia” (malignant neoplasm without specification of site). We estimate that 8 to 10% of death records that would have received follow up and may have resulted in a change to the underlying cause of death were not queried in 2016.

Missing/out of range values for out of state deaths

Information on decedents who were Washington state residents that died outside of Washington State are reported by the state of death to Washington State via the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Due to restrictions imposed by an inter-jurisdictional exchange agreement and differing State privacy laws, NCHS can no longer relay variables in death data from other states where the death occurred as of 2022.

Missing/out of range values for in state deaths

We typically conduct exploratory analyses of the death data variables to identify and correct missing and out of range values. Deaths occurring within Washington State and having missing or incorrect information are generally more easily corrected compared with out of state deaths.

Race and Ethnicity

Data collection

Informants/funeral homes provide DOH race and Hispanic ethnicity information for the decedent using a series of check boxes in the Washington Health and Life Events System (WHALES). These race and ethnicity options are consistent with the multiple options provided on the U.S. Standard Certificate of Death (2003). Informants/funeral homes may select as many race categories and as many Hispanic sub-categories as appropriate. Race and ethnicity are required fields even if the option is ‘unknown’.

- If the funeral home selects an “other” ethnicity or race option (e.g. “other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino” or “Other Asian”) they must enter additional details in the text box (literal) immediately following the “other” checkbox selected.
- All death records are forwarded to NCHS where the checkboxes and textboxes are assigned codes that are further processed to give us the individual race variables e.g. (‘Race White’, ‘Race Black’) and derived variables like ‘Race Summary Code’.

Figure 3. Screenshot of ethnicity fields in WHALES

50. Decedent's Hispanic Origin

☐ No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino

☐ Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano

☐ Yes, Puerto Rican

☐ Yes, Cuban

☐ Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino (e.g. Spaniard, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian)

Hispanic list Select

.....Specify other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino

☐ Unknown if Spanish/Hispanic/Latino

☐ Not obtainable

☐ Refused

Figure 4. Screenshot of race fields in WHALES

Main analytic variables

For routine analysis involving the creation of mortality rates based on census-based population estimates (e.g. those developed by Washington State Office of Financial Management) please use the following variables and values:

- ‘Hispanic NCHS Bridge’
 - 0 = Decedent was NOT Hispanic
 - 1 = Mexican
 - 2 = Puerto Rican
 - 3 = Cuban
 - 4 = Central or South American
 - 5 = Other and Unknown Hispanic
 - 9 = Unknown/Not Stated
 - Blank = Not processed by NCHS
- ‘Race Summary Code’ – using those who responded that they are NOT Hispanic analyze by the following single race groups:
 - American Indian or Alaska Native, single race only, non-Hispanic
 - Asian, single race only, non-Hispanic
 - Black or African American, single race only, non-Hispanic

- * Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, single race only, non-Hispanic
- White, single race only, non-Hispanic

For detailed guidelines please read visit: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1500/RaceEthnGuidelines.pdf>

Rationale Use of this variable and values allows for calculation of rates because it is consistent with Census and OFM categorization of race and ethnicity. Use of multi race groups isn't necessary given that only 1.3% of death records in Washington State indicate multiple race at this time.

Limitations – undercount of certain races because of how race/ethnicity is ascertained. Reporting of race/Hispanic ethnicity (origin) on death certificates is sometimes based on observing the decedent, rather than questioning the next of kin. This procedure causes an underestimate of deaths for certain groups, particularly Native Americans, some Asian subgroups, and Hispanics. Thus, death rates based on death certificate data are lower than true death rates for these groups.

Related variables

'Bridge Race'

NCHS creates a bridge race variable to make multiple-race and single race data collection systems more comparable so that data users can calculate race-specific statistics. The bridging methodology developed by NCHS bridges the multiple-race group population counts to the four single-race categories specified in the old 1977 federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standards. In 1997, OMB revised the 1977 standards for collection of race and ethnicity data increasing the number of race categories previously used from four (White, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN), and Asian or Pacific Islander (API)) to five (White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander). In addition, the revised standards require Federal data collection programs to allow respondents to select more than one race category when responding to a query on their racial identity. This provision means that under the revised standards there are potentially 31 race groups (5 single-race and 26 multiple-race), depending on whether an individual selects one, two, three, four, or all five of the single-race categories.

Race bridging is needed within a given data system because the change in the race standards results in incomparability across time, thus making it difficult to perform trend analyses.

WA DOH recommends using Race Summary because it allows Asians and Pacific Islanders to be reported as separate groups unlike Bridge Race. **Bridge Race and Race Calculation were removed starting with 2022 Data**

- ‘Hispanic NCHS Bridge’. A single variable which indicates both Hispanic ethnicity status and country of origin if decedent was Hispanic. Use ‘Hispanic NCHS Bridge’ when it is important to know the country to which the decedent had ancestral connection.

Cause of death

Data collection

The health care provider caring for the decedent at the time of death provides the cause of death via WHALES. Mirroring the U.S. Standard death certificate form, four lines (A-D) are used to record cause of death information with the initiating disease or injury listed on the lowest line. Other significant conditions is provided to capture contributing causes of death. **The figure on the next page is a screenshot of the medical certification cause of death fields.**

CHS forwards all raw cause of death information (i.e. the text information submitted through WHALES entered in the fields shown in Figure 2) in batches to NCHS for processing which includes the conversion of the words and phrases used to report causes of death into ICD10 codes. NCHS returns the coded to CHS, typically within 2 weeks.

While WHALES contains basic spell-check functions, it does not provide detailed guidance on how to report cause of death in accordance with standard rules of nosology. Furthermore, inconsistencies in the quality of information reported in the cause of death section also contribute to incomplete and/or inaccurate information on the diseases or injuries leading to death.

CHS corrects more obvious problems with cause of death reporting by mailing letters to medical providers who have reported non-specific or ill-defined

causes of death. Approximately 8% of all death data require follow up annually. About a third of the providers respond to follow up letters with more specific and useful information regarding the cause of death.

Figure 5. Screenshot of WHALES cause of death fields

PART I.
PART I. Enter the chain of events - diseases, injuries, or complications - that directly caused the death. DO NOT enter terminal events, such as cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, or ventricular fibrillation without showing the etiology. DO NOT ABBREVIATE.

34. Cause of Death

A. Immediate Cause of Death:
(Final disease or condition resulting in death)

0 / 120

Units

Select

Number

Approx. interval: onset to death

B. Due To or as a Consequence Of:

0 / 120

Unit

Select

Number

Approx. interval: onset to death

C. Due To or as a Consequence Of:

0 / 120

Unit

Select

Number

Approx. interval: onset to death

D. Due To or as a Consequence Of:

0 / 120

Unit

Select

Number

Approx. interval: onset to death

PART II.
PART II. Other significant conditions contributing to death but not resulting in the underlying cause given in Part I.

35. Other Significant Conditions

Other significant conditions contributing to death but not resulting in the underlying cause given in part I

0 / 240

Main analytic variables

‘Underlying COD Code’ - Typically, analysis of mortality data to calculate population-level death rates requires the use of the variable “Underlying COD code”.

Rationale Each condition reported on the death certificate is assigned a code based on the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 10th revision. Following ICD rules, one of these conditions is selected as the underlying cause-of-death which is defined as “(a) the disease or injury which initiated the train of morbid events leading directly to death, or (b) the circumstances of the accident or violence which produced the fatal injury.”

The standard practice in calculating mortality rates is to use the underlying cause of death as the numerator. It is a simplified representation of the initiating condition that led to death and therefore, is a practical and use-

34

ful measure in identifying leading health burdens and developing preventive measures on a population level.

Related variables

‘Record Axis Code 2’ through ‘Record Axis Code 20’ Analysis of ‘Underlying COD Code’ provides insight into the initiating cause of death, rather than the full sequence of events that led to death. Disease or injury events other than the underlying cause of death including co-morbidities are often recorded as multiple cause and contributing conditions. In the death statistical file, the series of variables titled Record Axis Code 1 through Record Axis Code 20 list ICD 10 codes for all conditions reported on the death certificate in the order they were reported beginning with the Underlying Cause in Record Axis Code 1. In producing this series of codes, NCHS applies rules of nosology to edit contradicting causes of death, duplicates, and imprecisions in the same death record. The result is a series of codes that are the most meaningful and logical sequence of codes representing a given death.

To tabulate **multiple cause of death** use:

- Record Axis Code 2 through Record Axis Code 20. Record Axis Code 1 is the underlying cause of death.

Other related variables Variables that are not typically used to measure the burden of disease in terms of mortality are **ACME Line 1 through 20, ACME Sequence 1 through 20, ACME Cause Category 1 through 20, and ACME Nature of Injury 1 through 20**. These variables are used to report the line (b through d, additional reported added lines, or the other contributing conditions lines in the cause of death statement – see Figure 2), the position of each stated disease or injury on the line they were reported, the ICD 10 code associated with the condition, and a one digit flag indicating that the death was a result of an injury.

Place of residence and occurrence

There are multiple variables in the death statistical data that provide information on places (country, state, county, city, zip) of birth, residence, and death.

Key analytic variables

Residence State FIPS Code

Use this variable to select Washington State residents (value “WA”). Mortality rates for Washington State are calculated using only state residents.

Death State

Use this variable if you wish to exclude deaths among Washington State residents that occurred out of state.

Related variables

‘Residence County City WA Code’ and ‘Death County City WA Code’ were discontinued starting with 2022 data, please use ‘Residence City FIPS Code’ and ‘Death City FIPS Code’.

City of residence and occurrence including the following variables: ‘Residence County City WA Code’, ‘Death County City WA Code’ All county-city codes are four-digit codes, with the first two digits being a county code and the second two being a city code. A city is given a separate code only if it has at least 2,500 people. Otherwise, it is given a ‘balance of county’ code (a two-digit county code and a city code of ‘00’), along with other small areas in the county. A city near the cutoff point may fluctuate above and below 2,500 population and thus may have a separate code in some years and not in others. For this reason, a count of zero deaths for one of these cities in a particular year may simply mean that it did not have a separate code in that year.

Population estimates provided by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) are used to establish which cities meet the population criteria for separate coding or become incorporated as separate cities. Since these estimates are published in the middle of the year, changes do not appear in the death data file until the following year. Thus, a city which first exceeds 2,500 population in 2024 would not have a separate code until 2025 are released.

The code for city of residence is based on whether or not the decedent lived within city limits. (These data are collected from the item on the death certificate: ‘Inside city limits - yes/no’.) If they did (or if the city limits item is blank or unknown), the residence is given a distinct city code, as described above. If they did not, the city code is set to ‘00’. The city code

in the file thus reflects reporting by the informant as to whether or not the decedent lived within city limits and may not agree with data determined by geocoding the address.

Zip Code of residence

- *For Death Statistical files 1968 through 2015*, the field, ‘geozip’, was added. The values for ‘geozip’ were determined from the geocoding process described below. The geocoded zip code may differ from the reported zip code for several reasons: (1) a data entry or reporting error for the reported zip code; (2) the zip code boundary changed; (3) the geocoding process matched the address to the wrong location. When working with data for 1988 through 2015, it is recommended that you use the ‘geozip’ field in preference to the reported zip code when the two zip codes do not agree. The reported zip code should continue to be used when the ‘geozip’ field is missing. However, zip code boundaries change over time, so caution should be used when using zip codes for deaths occurring in earlier years, especially prior to 1994. The number of addresses with differences between reported zip code and geocoded zip code will increase when using older files because the geocoded zip field will have different boundaries.
- *For death files 2016 onwards*, the geocoded zip code field will only be in the Death Geocode file. The Death Statistical file will only include the reported field, ‘Residence Zip Code’. It represents the zip code reported through WHALES. The reported zip code field will serve for most analyses, however, for those doing work that identifies specific zip codes, it is recommended that you use the geocoded zip code from the Death Geocode file.

Variables derived by geocoding residential address

Prior to 2025, an ArcGIS program matched reported residential addresses to published standardized geographic information. Through this process, we determined the lat/long of the residential addresses of the decedents and assign the addresses to specific school districts, census tracts, block groups, and census blocks (as defined by both census 2010 and census 2020). For death files 2025 onwards, an internal service to WHALES called WAMAS

(Washington Master Addressing Services) is used to determine the aforementioned lat/long of the residential address and assign the various geographies. Geocoded variables, including the geocoded zip code, is available in the final Death Geocode file for 2025.

CONTACT US

If you have any questions or suggestions for improving this technical document please contact us! Send your questions and comments to *CHS.DataRequests@doh.wa.gov*.
