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[Verification of Death: Overview](#)

Overview

As with any change of circumstances activity, it is important to establish the effective date of any new supersession correctly in line with legislation. Therefore when a report of a death is received, verification of the date of death must be obtained wherever possible.

A change as a result of a death needs to be treated with additional sensitivity when compared to other changes that may have occurred. The people concerned may be emotionally distressed at the recent loss or be in a state of emotional turmoil. However, we must still endeavour to take appropriate action to progress the Child Support case, whilst bearing this in mind.

Verification Levels (Customer Information System [CIS])

The CIS verification requirements are not prescribed by law. The Date of Death Verification Levels run from 0 to 3. The CMG minimum verification level as primary evidence for a date of death is level 1. For a verification level of 0, secondary evidence is required. See Decision Making Guidance for further information.

Note: the General Register Office (GRO) have changed their process for recovering death certificates. As a direct result, it is less likely that CIS will show a verified status of anything above Level 0 (as JCP colleagues will not be incurring the cost of getting a death certificate, so will not be able to verify to anything above Level 0).

Date of death - verification levels

There are four levels:

Verified to Level 3 (Full supporting documentation provided)

- Death Certificate BD8
- Notification from General Registrars Office (system or clerical)
- Certificate of Registry showing given names and family name

- General Registrars Office copy
- Notification of death issued by the Forces Department of the Ministry of Defence (MOD)
- Notification of death issued by the Registrar General of the Shipping and Seamen (Mercantile Marine)
- Death Certificate issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Full British consular, embassy or high commission)
- Coroners Interim Certificate as to Fact of Death

Verified to Level 2 (Partial supporting documentation provided)

- Documented Coroners Verdict or Procurator Fiscals report (in Scotland)
- Presumption of death by a court of Law in England, Scotland or Wales

Verified to Level 1 (limited supporting documentation provided)

- Notification from Hospital
- Police Statement
- Return of product with a declaration of death document. This can be in the form of a letter from a relative or representative of the deceased, press release or memorial card.
- Telephone call from the next of kin, other relative or representative of the deceased. (N.B. DWP will accept and record this verification at Level 2 based on the fact that GRO confirmation will be received by CIS)

Not Verified will show as '0'

Where the death has not been verified see 'Secondary Evidence'

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Report of a Death

When a report of a death is received, the CMG will have to verify the death. The evidence required is generally obtained by requesting the caller reporting the death, to provide the evidence or if the death is a client the name of the client's executor. It is not necessary that the caller is the other client or a representative (rep), i.e. the caller may be a relative or a friend. Obtaining this information is not a breach of data protection law.

Key Points to Remember During Contact

Where a call is received reporting a death, it is essential to remember to:

- be courteous/considerate to the caller;
 - offer the caller your condolences at hearing of their loss;
 - remain courteous and empathic at all times during your conversation;
 - apologise but explain that, although it may be arduous for them, you would like to ask them some questions as, if we can gather as much information as possible now, we may not need to make further contact, disturbing them during their time of loss;
 - deliver any questions you pose in a non-confrontational manner, remembering at all times that the person you are talking to may just have suffered an (extreme) emotional shock;
 - moderate your tone of voice – this is vital as, although some of the questions you may be asking are quite probing, if your questioning shows sensitivity, the person may still be prepared to answer your questions;
 - offer to arrange a call-back (and arrange a time with them) if they become emotionally distressed at any point during your contact; and
 - thank the person, at the end of the call, for having understood the reason for the questions you have asked and sparing the time to answer such difficult questions during their time of loss.
- - always remain sensitive to the emotions of the person you are in contact with – if the person you are talking to becomes distressed, offer to call them back and arrange a time to call;
 - wherever possible, obtain primary evidence. Check CIS in all cases, regardless of any “financial benefit” considerations, and record the status shown in any decision notes;
 - if you have been unable to obtain primary evidence, consider financial gain, see Decision Making Guidance for additional information;
 - treat all cases on their own merits;
 - fully record and clearly explain the reasoning behind the decision you are making. Death verified at level 1 or above on CIS/ a death certificate (usually) provides ‘primary evidence’, however where

secondary information has been used, this should be clearly documented, including an explanation of why it was felt this provided sufficient evidence upon which to action a change.

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Primary Evidence

Certain information, in and of itself, may be sufficient for you to take action on a case. Other information may be of a “lower” quality and require further supporting evidence before any action should be taken. The following information outlines the “hierarchy” of evidence and what action you should take after your contact with a person reporting a death.

It may be possible to obtain a copy of a death certificate from the local registry office where the death occurred.

Note: an Interim Death Certificate cannot be accepted as primary evidence to verify a death. The date of death given may be subject to change (which could cause issues trying to rectify the amount of any debt / overpayments resulting from having to revise any decision we may already have made). However, in conjunction with further supporting evidence an interim certificate could be considered as secondary evidence.

Death certificates

Death certificates are issued by a registrar when a doctor or, in certain circumstances a coroner, confirms a death. If a death certificate can be provided, this evidence is sufficient to allow for a supersession decision to be made and any appropriate action to be taken on the Child Support case. A copy of the certificate is sufficient, rather than the original but, if an original is received, you should copy it and return the original.

Death status verified by the Customer Information Service (CIS)

In all cases, regardless of any other information that you may have gathered, a check of CIS must always be made, and the result recorded in your decision. Where the reported death is also supported by a verified status of level 1 or above verification on CIS, this should be sufficient to take action on the Child Support case.

Where CIS shows the death verified at level 0, the CMG cannot accept this as primary evidence, therefore secondary evidence will be required. See below for secondary evidence further information.

Note: CIS very occasionally shows a verified death in error. As such, you must always make a check of the case to ensure that there is no contradictory evidence held there – if the person who has been reported as having died is shown to have made contact with the CMG after the verified date of death shown on CIS, you will need to consider any other evidence you have gathered before making a decision.

No Primary Evidence

Where primary evidence has not been obtained, you will have to consider if the person reporting the death may benefit financially because of it. Once you have considered if there would be any financial benefit, consider secondary evidence. See below for further information.

Potential Financial Benefit

As with any supersession activity, the death of a party to a case will benefit one “party” of the case financially (in respect of the Child Support liability), whereas one party will lose out. This must be considered in all cases, and documented in the decision notes. At no point, in any conversation with a person in which the death of a party to a case is discussed should any reference be made to “financial benefit” (e.g. you should not say, “If I action the change you’ve reported, you would stand to gain financially, so I need more evidence....”).

If the person notifying the death does not stand to gain financially by any resulting supersession, the change could be actioned based on their statement alone.

However, if the person reporting the death could stand to gain financially, you would have to make your decision based on any other evidence you can obtain (primary and / or secondary).

The following lists some examples, but is not exhaustive – there may be other scenarios that you encounter.

Instances where there would be no financial benefit

- Where a parent with care reports the death of a qualifying child, in respect of whom they receive maintenance;
- Where a non-resident parent reports the death of their relevant other child, or any child in respect of whom an allowance is made in the calculation (Child of the Family or Child Abroad);
- Where the parent with care’s death is reported by their third party representative, their solicitor or a relative.

Instances where there could be a financial benefit

- Where a non-resident parent reports the death of a qualifying child, in respect of whom they pay maintenance;
- Where the parent with care reports the death of a non-resident parent's relevant other child, or any child in respect of whom an allowance is made in the calculation (Child of the Family or Child Abroad);
- Where the non-resident parent's death is reported by their third party representative, a solicitor or a relative (in particular the non-resident parent's partner).

Secondary Evidence

Secondary evidence does not, of itself, necessarily provide conclusive proof but may be highly indicative of the reported death having occurred. Even if there may be primary evidence that can be provided following the contact, you should still endeavour to gather as much secondary evidence in your initial conversation.

When making a decision based on secondary evidence alone, you should always aim to have at least two pieces of secondary evidence which indicate the death has occurred before actioning a supersession. Even then, you may not feel that the secondary evidence is sufficiently substantive to satisfy you that the death has occurred. However, if you feel that one piece of secondary evidence provides sufficient proof of the death, you could still base a decision on that (for example, the non-resident parent was a well known celebrity and their death is reported in the national media).

In all cases, you must also clearly document the reasons why you are either:

- satisfied that the evidence confirms the death; or
- the evidence is not sufficiently robust to satisfy you that the death has occurred, beyond reasonable doubt.

Secondary evidence, which should be requested of the person reporting the death includes:

- Interim Death Certificate
- confirmation from the DVLA / Passport Office that a drivers' licence / passport in the name of the alleged deceased has been "cancelled" as a result of the person having died;
- any documentation relating to funeral arrangements;
- any information relating to the death given in the media - specific articles, rather than just an entry in the "births and deaths" section;

- information from life insurance providers – for example, a letter from the provider confirming that a life insurance policy will now pay out. As there could be potential insurance fraud, additional secondary evidence will be required to support information from life insurance providers.

Note: This list is not definitive and you should ask if there is “anything else” that can be forwarded on to us that could be of use to us, relating to the death.

Information from social networking sites (Facebook / myspace / gonetoooon.org etc.) should be considered as insufficient evidence upon which to base a decision and is NOT considered as being secondary evidence.

If you are unable to obtain secondary evidence, contact Advice and Guidance.

Questions To Ask The Caller Reporting A Death

Remember when handling the call to:

- remain courteous and treat the caller with sensitivity, as they may have just lost a loved one (think about how you would feel in their situation and how you would wish to be spoken to);
- apologise for having to ask questions, but explain that you need to gather as much information as early as possible to take action on the Child Support case;
- advise them that by answering your questions now, we may not need to make further contacts at a later date, avoiding additional distress.

Note: A caller reporting a death may not be the client’s representative, however we can still ask the questions detailed below as this would not breach data protection law.

Questions to ask

Note: A caller reporting a death may not be the client’s representative, however we can still ask the questions detailed below as this would not breach data protection law:

- when did the death occur;
- do you have a copy of the death certificate and could it be forwarded on to us;
- who is the executor / person granted letters of administration;
- other than the death certificate, are there any other documents available that confirm the death i.e. acceptance of life insurance claims / confirmation from DVLA that the drivers’ licence has been cancelled / confirmation from the Passport Office that the deceased’s passport has been cancelled etc.

- have any preparations been made in respect of funeral arrangements as yet?
If so, could copies of any documentation relating to this be forwarded on to us;
- is there “anything else” that could assist us (see Secondary Evidence above)?

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PLDMG @ 09.03.2017