

*The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs), registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by its registrants. The term nurse in this document refers to LPNs, RNs, RPNs and NPs unless otherwise stated.*

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## Can nurses pronounce death?

Pronouncing death is the process of determining that vital signs have ceased, and a client has died.

Pronouncing death by determining the cessation of life through a nursing assessment is within the scope of practice of all nurses in Nova Scotia. Nurses with the necessary knowledge, skill and judgment to assess cessation of vital signs may pronounce death.

**Pronouncing Death:**  
Determining cessation of life - in all nurses' professional scope.

In Nova Scotia, there is no requirement that indicates only specific health care professionals are permitted to pronounce a client's death.

When death is unexpected, the nurse should collaborate with other members of the health care team, including the most responsible practitioner, either a nurse practitioner (NP) or physician, to determine the next steps. This may include informing the medical examiner and determining if the body can be moved.

Nurses must follow their organizational policies regarding pronouncing death in their workplace.

## Can nurses certify death?

Certifying death is the process where the Medical Certificate of Death (MCD) is completed and signed.

In Nova Scotia, NPs and physicians are the only health practitioners who are able to certify death.

NPs are **authorized** to certify death if they are the health care provider responsible for the treatment and care of the client and if the client's death is expected as the result of a diagnosed chronic or acute illness or condition.

**Certifying Death:**  
Medical Certificate of Death (MCD)- NP professional scope only.

NPs are **not authorized** to certify death and must notify the Medical Examiner immediately where there is reason to believe that the death is a result of any of the circumstances listed in sections 9-12 of the [Nova Scotia Fatality Investigations Act](#).

NPs who graduated from an NP program that did not include information about certifying death (prior to 2016) and those educated outside the province must complete postgraduate [Medical Certificate of Death Education from Dalhousie University](#) prior to certifying a death. Once the required education is complete, NP's are able to sign the MCD.

The NP is not required to provide NSCN with their certificate of completion of this course. The NP will be required to provide their licence number when completing the medical certificate of death.

## Further Reading

- [Nova Scotia Vital Statistics Act](#)
- [Nova Scotia Fatality Investigations Act](#)
- [Nova Scotia Timely Medical Certificates Act](#)

For further information on anything contained within this practice guideline, please contact a NSCN Practice Consultant at [practice@nscn.ca](mailto:practice@nscn.ca).