

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

POLICY: IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING CONFIRMED ACCIDENTAL DRUG-RELATED OVERDOSE DEATHS

June 2015

The following methodology for reporting and identifying drug-related accidental overdose deaths in Rhode Island was developed by the Department of Health (the Department) with assistance from the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals, the Office of State Medical Examiners (OSME), the Office of Vital Records and the Center for Health Data and Analysis (CHDA). Currently, this methodology is used to report all accidental drug-related overdose deaths.

As with all other reported illnesses and diseases, the Department strives to report accurate and verified data in a timely and informative manner. Upon confirmation of an accidental drug-related overdose death in the State of Rhode Island by the OSME, the Department shall include such deaths in an ongoing report that will now be shared weekly. This revised policy reflects a change from previous monthly reports with apparent deaths to weekly reporting of only the deaths that have been confirmed by the Office of State Medical Examiners as accidental drug-related deaths. This change supports the balance between providing accurate and confirmed data and the need for timely release of information.

The OSME provides information including the cause, manner and circumstances of each OSME-confirmed accidental drug overdose death to the Office of Vital Records at the Department of Health. This information is used by the Office of Vital Records to update the decedent's death certificate and is sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Once compiled, the CDC sends back to Rhode Island all of the RI death certificate data with classification and coding according to the 10th revision of International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10). This "ICD-coded Office of Vital Records data" for Rhode Island is used in the Department's annual mortality reports, including the reporting of drug-related overdose deaths. As the process for obtaining the ICD-coded data is lengthy, and for the purposes of reporting timely and ongoing accidental drug-related overdose deaths, the Department shall use OSME-confirmed data for its reporting of drug-related accidental overdose deaths, which will be made available on a weekly basis.

PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY UPDATE

This policy has been updated to implement a consistent methodology to establish a baseline data set of reliable, timely and accurate data and reports to assist the State of Rhode Island in reviewing and analyzing trends to combat and address the increase in accidental drug-related overdose deaths.

SOURCE OF DATA

Data used to identify accidental drug-related overdose deaths are obtained by the OSME. Rhode Island law requires reporting to, and investigation by, the OSME of all deaths occurring in the state in which there is reasonable evidence to suspect accident, suicide, homicide or other unnatural process or unusual manner including all deaths that are due to the use of addictive or unidentifiable chemical agents and all deaths that are the immediate or remote consequences of any physical or toxic injury. Depending on the circumstances, the OSME investigation may include scene examination, witness reports, review of medical and police reports, external inspection or autopsy, and toxicological analysis of autopsy or hospital specimens. The information compiled during this investigation is used by the OSME to determine the cause, manner and circumstances of death and is stored in the OSME electronic data base and/or paper files along with the information sent to the Office of Vital Records for the death certificate.

IDENTIFICATION AND CONFIRMATION OF DRUG-RELATED ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSE DEATHS

A death is considered to be an “OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose death” if:

1. The death was pronounced in Rhode Island; and
2. The final manner of death is accident; and
3. A drug is listed on the death certificate as a cause of death or a significant contributing factor; and
4. The Chief Medical Examiner or his/her designee has reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of information sent to the Office of Vital Records for the final death certificate.

Note that the “OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose deaths” includes individuals who are not Rhode Island residents and individuals who were brought to Rhode Island from another state for treatment and were pronounced dead in Rhode Island of what ended up being confirmed by the OSME as an accidental drug-related death. These deaths involve illicit or “street” drugs and/or pharmaceutical drugs (prescription or over-the-counter), which may or may not have been prescribed to the individual who has died. These deaths may also involve use or abuse of alcohol, but deaths in which alcohol is the only substance listed on the death certificate are not included in the OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose death data set. Accidental deaths due to toxic substances other than drugs manufactured for therapeutic or recreational purposes, such as pesticides, heavy metals, carbon monoxide or abused gases and cleaning products are also excluded from the OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose death data set. The OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose death data set does not include drug-related deaths in which the final manner of death has been classified as suicide, homicide or undetermined, which is used most frequently when the possibility of an intentional drug overdose (suicide) is not confirmed but also cannot be reasonably ruled out.

REPORTING OF OSME- CONFIRMED ACCIDENTAL DRUG-RELATED OVERDOSE DEATH DATA

The Department shall release publicly on the Department of Health Website at www.health.ri.gov/data/drugoverdoses/ the number of OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose deaths by month for the previous six (6)-month period (Confirmed Data Release). The Department shall update the Confirmed Data Release with OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose deaths on a weekly basis.

REPORT OF “OFFICE OF VITAL RECORDS ICD-CODED DRUG OVERDOSE DEATH DATA”:

On an annual basis the Department shall, through the Office of Vital Records, release a data report that includes drug overdose death data generated using the standardized national classifications defined by the CDC using the ICD-coded data maintained in the Office of Vital Records.

RELEASE OF DEPARTMENT DATA

All within referenced and described Department data reports for OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose deaths and/or annual Office of Vital Records ICD-coded drug overdose deaths shall be de-identified in accordance with all State and Federal Laws including but not limited to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule and the Department’s Statistical Precision and Confidentiality Reporting Guidelines.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS CONCERNING OSME-CONFIRMED ACCIDENTAL DRUG-RELATED OVERDOSE DEATHS AND/OR OFFICE OF VITAL RECORDS ICD-CODED DRUG OVERDOSE DEATH DATA (“REPORTS”)

All requests for Department reports concerning OSME-confirmed accidental drug-related overdose deaths and/or annual Office of Vital Records ICD-coded drug overdose death data shall be made to the Center for Health Data and Analysis by emailing samara.vinerbrown@health.ri.gov.