

NVDRS Incident Death Types (Abstractor Assigned Manner of Death)

For public health purposes, violent deaths are assigned to types according to the ICD code assigned to the underlying cause of death indicated on the death certificate by the medical examiner. However, medical examiners may not use the same definitions in all states. Therefore, NVDRS will also try to achieve some standardization of death type through these definitions. Some of the NVDRS incident types are not included as options on a standard death certificate. The actual death certificate manner is captured in the death certificate variables, however, the NVDRS definition may be slightly different (e.g., a person dying after being shot by a police officer in the line of duty may be called a 'homicide' on the death certificate but will be called a 'legal intervention' death in NVDRS). Similarly, a self-inflicted firearm death ruled 'accidental' on a death certificate will be included as an 'unintentional firearm – self inflicted' death in NVDRS. NVDRS sites should use these definitions to identify preliminary cases.

A. Suicide - A death resulting from the intentional use of force against oneself. A preponderance of evidence should indicate that the use of force was intentional.

Specific scenarios that should be classified as suicide:

- A person engaged in a suicidal act, then changed his mind, but still died as a result of the act
- A person intended only to injure rather than kill himself (e.g., a man shot himself in the leg with intent to injure but severed the femoral artery and died)
- Assisted suicide involving passive assistance to the decedent (e.g., supplying only means or information needed to complete the act)
- Intentional, self-inflicted deaths committed while under the influence of a mind-altering drug taken voluntarily
- Intentional, self-inflicted deaths committed while under the influence of a mental illness

Specific scenarios that should not be classified as suicide: (The preferred NVDRS category is shown in parentheses.)

- The physical consequences of chronic substance abuse, including alcohol or drugs (natural death)
- Acute substance abuse including alcohol or drugs with less than a preponderance of evidence of intent to use the substance(s) against oneself (undetermined or unintentional injury death)
- Death as a result of autoerotic behavior, e.g., self-strangulation during sexual activity (unintentional injury death)

B. Homicide - A death resulting from the intentional use of force or power, threatened or actual, against another person, group, or community. A preponderance of evidence must indicate that the use of force was intentional. Such deaths resulting from legal intervention are included in a separate category below. Two special scenarios the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) regards as homicides are included in the

NVDRS definition: (1) arson with no intent to injure a person, and (2) a stabbing with intent unspecified.

Specific scenarios that should be classified as homicide:

- Deaths when the suspect intended to only injure rather than kill the victim
- Deaths resulting from heart attacks induced when someone uses force or power against the decedent
- A death resulting from a weapon that discharges unintentionally while being used to control or frighten the victim
- Deaths that result when a person kills an attacker in self-defense
- Deaths labeled “justifiable homicides” where the person committing the homicide was not a police officer
- Deaths that result from a variation of Russian roulette where one person aims a partially loaded gun at another person and pulls the trigger knowing that there was at least some chance that the gun would fire
- Death attributed to “child abuse” without an intent being specified
- Death of a child after birth that results from a direct injury due to violence sustained prior to birth
- Death that results from an intentional act of neglect or omission by one person against another

Specific scenarios that should not be classified as homicide: (The preferred NVDRS category is shown in parentheses.)

- “Vehicular homicide” without a preponderance of evidence of intent to use force against another (unintentional injury)
- Hunting accident with a gun (unintentional firearm injury)
- Accidental deaths at shooting ranges (unintentional firearm injury)
- A youth kills someone by playing with a gun he believes is unloaded (unintentional firearm injury)
- Deaths that take place in combat in declared or undeclared wars (operation of war)
- Death of a child after birth that results indirectly from violence sustained by its mother before its birth, e.g., a death from prematurity following premature labor brought on by violence (coded as “condition originating in the perinatal period”)
- Accidental poisoning deaths due to illegal or prescription drug overdose, even when the person who provided those drugs was charged with homicide (unintentional deaths not involving firearms are outside the scope of NVDRS; a death of this type might be within the scope of “undetermined manner of death,” below, if it is impossible to determine whether the death was intentional or unintentional)

C. Undetermined manner of death - A death resulting from the use of force or power against oneself or another person for which the evidence indicating one manner of death is no more compelling than the evidence indicating another manner of death.

Specific scenarios that should be classified as undetermined manner of death:

- Coroner or medical examiner ruling that states: “accident or suicide,” “accident or homicide,” “undetermined,” “open verdict,” or “jumped or fell”
- Self-inflicted injuries when the records give no evidence or opinions in favor of either unintentional or intentional injury

D. Unintentional firearm injury death - A death resulting from a penetrating injury or gunshot wound from a weapon that uses a powder charge to fire a projectile when there was a preponderance of evidence that the shooting was not intentionally directed at the victim.

Specific scenarios that should be classified as unintentional firearm deaths:

- Celebratory firing that was not intended to frighten, control, or harm anyone
- A person shoots himself when using a gun to frighten, control, or harm another person
- A child less than the age of 6 shoots himself or another person
- A soldier who is shot during field exercises in peacetime
- A person mistakenly thinks a gun is unloaded and shoots himself or another person while fooling around with it
- A child who dies after birth from an unintentional firearm injury that is sustained prior to birth, i.e., in utero

Specific scenarios that should not be classified as unintentional firearm deaths: (The preferred NVDRS category is shown in parentheses.)

- A person unintentionally shoots someone while defending himself against an aggressor (homicide)
- A person unintentionally shoots another person while using a gun to commit a crime (homicide)
- Firearm injuries caused by unintentionally striking a person with the firearm, e.g., by dropping it on someone’s head, rather than with a projectile fired from the firearm (potential homicide or non-NVDRS accident)
- Unintentional injuries from non-powder guns such as BB, pellet, and other compressed air or gas-powered guns (potential homicide or suicide)

E. Legal intervention death A death when the decedent was killed by a police officer or other peace officer (persons with specified legal authority to use deadly force), including military police, acting in the line of duty.

Specific scenarios that should be classified as legal interventions:

- “Justifiable” and “criminal” homicides meeting the above definition

Specific scenarios that should not be included in the legal intervention category in NVDRS:

- Legal executions

F. Terrorism-related death - Terrorism deaths are homicides or suicides that result from events that are labeled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as acts of terrorism.

Terrorism is a mechanism of death rather than a manner of death. The manner of such death is either homicide or suicide.