

20:15 Hannah Scott/KIRO – Can somebody detail how we are calculating the number of deaths from COVID-19 in our state, and specifically answer the question of whether we are including people who have just tested positive, regardless of how they die ...?

20:52 This is Kathy Lofy, I can try to answer the question about deaths but we may have to get back to you because we really need to talk to the people on the ground that are doing it. So, we can identify deaths in different ways. A case generally comes into – we generally first learn about a patient with COVID-19 through laboratory reporting. So the positive laboratory report comes to the department of health, and then the local health department starts to investigate the case. So if they find out the individual has died – so if they find out the person has been hospitalized and then died in the hospital, it's generally the hospital that will report the death to the local health department. And if somebody came in with COVID-19, and then ended up dying of something very, very unrelated, it would not be counted from that perspective. But I do have to say that sometimes it's pretty hard to tell if the COVID-19 infection could have contributed to the death in any way. So like, for example for influenza, we see lots of people who get diagnosed with influenza, and then go on to have like cardiac problems that lead to their death that's thought to be triggered by the influenza. So in determining the cause of death, it can sometimes be a little bit challenging. We do leave it up to the healthcare provider to tell us whether they think COVID-19 contributed to the deaths. That's one way we can find out if someone has died. The second way is that we receive death certificates electronically at the Department of Health as part of our vital statistics work and we use that data and we link that data to our identified COVID cases to see if we find anybody who's been reported, but then we subsequently receive a death certificate for, if that makes sense. Because sometimes, you know, the hospitals may not give us a call back if a patient is hospitalized and then passes away. And so we also learn about deaths through are electronic death system. And I would have to ask real specifically to the people who are doing that work exactly which deaths they count and which ones they don't, because as I say, they can be a little bit difficult to sort out, like, if the death is related to COVID-19. And I can find – we'd have to get back to you about how exactly the deaths that are picked up by the electronic death certificates are counted. So that was a long answer, but the system is a little complicated. We hear about deaths through different means. And then the third way that we hear about deaths is, if somebody dies at home, a medical examiner or a coroner calls us and says, you know, this person died at home, I've heard they had respiratory symptoms, I'd like to test them for COVID-19. We work with the medical examiner or coroner to get them tested, and then again it's a little bit of a judgment call from the medical examiners' perspective as to whether they think COVID-19 caused the death or contributed to the death.