

Organ and Tissue Donation After Death by Circulatory Criteria (DCC)



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How does organ and tissue donation after death happen in Canada?

- Organ and tissue donation after death is when a person who has chosen to donate dies and 1 or more of their organs (like the liver, lungs, heart, or kidneys) is removed and transplanted into another person to help that person live.
- In Canada, a person can donate organs and tissue after death in 2 ways:
 1. **Death by circulatory criteria (DCC):** This is when the heart stops beating and does not start again.
 2. **Death by neurological criteria (DNC):** This is when the brain stops working and will not work again. This is also called brain death.
- This pamphlet gives information about donation after death by circulatory criteria (DCC).

What is death by circulatory criteria (DCC)?

- The brain and other organs need blood with oxygen to work. The heart pumps blood through the body.
- When the heart stops beating, the organs stop getting oxygen and the person dies. This is called **death by circulatory criteria (DCC)**.
- It may be possible to donate organs after DCC.

What will happen if I decide to have my loved one donate?

- The organ donation coordinator will explain what will happen and answer any questions you may have.
- If you decide that your loved one would want to donate, the donation team will guide and support you.
- If you decide that your loved one would not want to donate, your health care team will still give your loved one and you care, comfort, and respect.

What do I need to do?

- Your health care team will ask for your consent (permission) to have your loved one donate. **This is your choice. You can change your mind at any time.**
- The organ donation coordinator may ask about your loved one's:
 - › Health
 - › Travel history
 - › Medications
 - › Lifestyle

What will happen before my loved one donates?

- Your health care team may do tests on your loved one, like blood work, X-rays, or an ECG/EKG (test to record the heart's rhythm). These tests help the team decide which organs or tissues can be donated.
- Your health care team will share the test results with the Multi-Organ Transplant Program (MOTP). This will help the MOTP find people waiting for a transplant who are the best match.
- The donation surgery will be planned so it can happen quickly after your loved one's death is confirmed. The donation team and the transplant team will work with you to decide the donation time.

What is life support?

- Life support is the use of machines or medications to help a person stay alive. One common life support machine is a ventilator, which helps a person breathe and gives their body oxygen.

What does it mean to withdraw life support?

- Withdrawing (taking away) life support means stopping the machines or medications helping your loved one stay alive.
- Before your loved one's life support is stopped, you will be given time and privacy to say goodbye in your own way. If you have any cultural, spiritual, or religious practices, please tell a member of your health care team. We will do our best to support your wishes.
- Your health care team will focus on keeping your loved one comfortable and managing their pain.

Can I stay with my loved one?

- Yes. You may stay with your loved one while they are taken off life support and as they pass away.

How long will it take for my loved one to die?

- After your loved one's life support is stopped, they may pass away within a few hours or days. The amount of time is different for each person.
- **To safely donate organs**, death needs to happen within a certain amount of time after stopping life support. This is usually between 60 to 180 minutes (1 to 3 hours).
- If your loved one dies in that time, they will be quickly moved to the O.R. for surgery.
- If your loved one does not die within that time, their organs cannot be donated. They may still be able to donate tissue.
- **Your health care team will keep giving your loved one care and support until their life ends.**

How does the health care team know when death has happened?

- When you are ready, your health care team will stop life support. We will give your loved one medication to help manage pain. Your health care team will stay with your loved one and keep giving care.
- Once your loved one's heart has stopped beating, 2 doctors will watch carefully for 5 minutes to make sure their heart does not start beating again. Then they will check your loved one's body and listen to their chest to make sure there is no heartbeats or breathing sounds. This will confirm your loved one's death.

How long does organ and tissue donation take?

- It may take 48 to 72 hours to do all the steps needed to safely donate organs and tissue, and to find the people who need them most.

What will happen after my loved one has donated?

- The donation team will make every effort to avoid slowing down your funeral plans. As soon as your loved one has donated, their body will be released to you or to a funeral home. This is usually within 24 hours (1 day).
- Donation does not affect funeral plans. Open casket funerals, green burials, and cremation are all possible after organ or tissue donation. All efforts are made so that there are no signs that the person was a donor.

You are not alone. Legacy of Life is here to support you. They can offer care and comfort, and help you cope with your loss.

Questions?

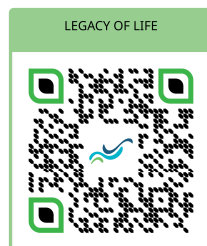
- Organ donation coordinators are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call Locating and ask to talk with an organ donation coordinator:
 - › Phone: 902-473-2222

Legacy of Life: Nova Scotia Organ and Tissue Donation Program

Park Lane Terraces
Suite 300, 3rd Floor
5657 Spring Garden Road
Halifax, NS B3J 3R4

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-844-411-LIFE (5433)
- › Email: Legacyoflife@nshealth.ca
- › www.nshealth.ca/legacy-life

Scan the QR code on your device (open the camera on your device, point the camera at the code, and tap the banner or border that appears)



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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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