

DONATION AFTER CIRCULATORY DEATH (DCD)

Circulatory or cardiovascular death means a person has died because their heart has stopped beating and blood is no longer circulating through the body. Donation after circulatory death happens when a person has a serious injury or illness and that person's family decides, together with doctors who are independent of the donation and transplant team, that continuing life-sustaining support is no longer desired.

HOSPITALIZATION AND TREATMENT

After someone suffers a significant injury or illness, hospitalization occurs for lifesaving treatment. The hospital care team, operating independently from the organ recovery and transplant teams, exhausts all options and determines the patient is unlikely to survive or recover without life-sustaining support such as a ventilator, and communicates this with the patient's family.

DECISION TO WITHDRAW LIFE-SUSTAINING SUPPORT

Together, the patient's family and the hospital care team determine whether continuing life-sustaining support is no longer desired. This decision is made independently of the organ donation process. The hospital contacts Indiana Donor Network to determine if organ donation may be possible.

FAMILY DISCUSSION AND AUTHORIZATION

Indiana Donor Network staff meet with the family to discuss lifesaving organ donation and provide compassionate education. If the patient is a registered donor, authorization is already documented and the donation process will proceed if medically suitable. If the patient is not already a registered donor, the patient's legally authorized decision-maker (as defined by the Indiana Uniform Anatomical Gift Act) may approve or decline donation.

MEDICAL EVALUATION AND MATCHING

Indiana Donor Network reviews the potential donor's medical history and coordinates testing to determine which organs are suitable for transplant. Medically suitable organs are matched to patients on the national transplant waiting list in consultation with transplant surgeons. This highly regulated process considers blood type, organ size, proximity and recipient illness severity. This process may extend the patient's time on a ventilator.

LIFE-SUSTAINING SUPPORT IS WITHDRAWN

Withdrawal of life-sustaining support is managed by the hospital care team, independent from the organ donation and transplant teams. Withdrawal takes place with the organ donation team on standby to begin surgical recovery of lifesaving organs soon after death is declared, to maintain organ viability. This process is explained thoroughly to the family before final goodbyes and withdrawal.

DOES THE HEART STOP BEATING AND THE PATIENT DIES?

YES

The hospital care team observes the patient to confirm that heart circulation and breathing stop. Additionally, the team wait for a mandatory minimum of five minutes to verify that circulation and breathing do not restart on their own. After this waiting period, a hospital physician unaffiliated with the organ donation and transplant teams declares death. The patient's family leaves the room so that their loved one can save lives through time-sensitive organ donation. Recovered organs are transported for lifesaving transplants, and Indiana Donor Network coordinates transportation of the donor hero to the family's chosen funeral home.

NO

Upon removal of ventilator or other mechanical life support, the hospital care team observes the patient to confirm the ability to sustain respiratory and circulatory function. If the patient continues to have a heartbeat and breathes on their own, organ donation does not take place. The patient remains with the hospital care team for further evaluation.

Organ recovery never occurs without legal declaration of death made by a physician who is independent from the organ donation and transplant teams.

Indiana Donor Network provides updates about the impact of the decision to donate and maintains relationships with families of donor heroes, offering ongoing grief support options, memory-making opportunities, and invitations to events to honor donor heroes. Indiana Donor Network can also facilitate communication between donor families and recipients, and if both parties agree, can help coordinate direct interaction.

Learn more about family support at IndianaDonorNetwork.org/donor-families.