

Organ Donation Frequently Asked Questions

- [Versión en español](#)

1. Why are organ, tissue and eye donations needed?

There is a severe shortage of organs for life-saving transplants. In addition to those New Yorkers waiting for organ transplants, many more are helped by tissue donation such as skin for burn victims or eye donations for sight-restoring cornea transplants. Without these surgeries, they will die or remain disabled. Transplants give people a chance to resume full, productive lives.

2. Who can become a donor?

People of all ages may be able to become an organ, eye and tissue donor. Your medical condition at the time of death will decide what organs and tissues can be donated and/or used. Do not rule yourself out.

3. How do I sign up to be an organ, eye and tissue donor?

You must be 18 years of age to sign up for the New York State Donate Life Registry.

You can sign up when you obtain a driver license or non-driver identification (ID) card, or when you renew your driver license by signing the donor box that appears on each of these forms. **Signing the back of your license does not enroll you in the New York State Donate Life Registry.** You can also sign up through the New York State Health Department's web site, <http://www.health.ny.gov/donatelife> or on your voter registration form.

4. What happens when I join the Donate Life Registry?

Signing up for the the New York State Donate Life Registry documents your gift, meaning that you are giving your legal consent to donate organs, eyes and tissues after death. Registry information is kept private and can only be accessed for the purpose of identifying potential organ, eye and tissue donors at the time of death. Once you sign up, you will not need to carry a wallet card. Signing up for the registry is enough.


5. When I sign up, do I need to carry a wallet card to indicate my status as a donor?

No, New York State does not issue donor wallet cards. Signing up in the New York State Donate Life Registry is enough.

6. I have already joined the New York State Life Pass it On Registry - should I sign up for the Donate Life Registry? What is the difference?

To ensure that your decision to be an organ, tissue and eye donor is honored, you must sign up for the Donate Life Registry. If you joined the Life Pass it On intent registry, your name is not automatically switched to the Donate Life consent registry.

The Life Pass It on Registry was created in 1999 and records someone's wish to be an organ and tissue donor. This is called an intent registry. Intent registries require next of kin's consent for donation to proceed in the event of the potential donor's death.

 In 2006, a new law created the Donate Life Registry: a registry that records a person's own *legal consent* to organ, tissue and eye donation upon his or her death. If you are signed up in this new registry, your family will be informed of your decision and given information about the donation process, but their consent is not required to proceed with donation.

7. Do I have to tell my family about my decision to donate?

It is strongly encouraged that you inform your family of your decision to donate. This may help when we tell your family of your decision.

8. How does the donation process begin?

Hospitals are required to alert their federally designated organ procurement organization of all deaths. If you die outside of the hospital, your wish to donate may still be honored only if your family immediately notifies the coroner or funeral home.

9. If I join the Donate Life Registry, will medical care be compromised?

No. Donation is only an option after all efforts to save the patient have failed and the patient has died. Saving the patient's life is the health care provider's main concern.

10. What will happen to my donated organs and tissues?

When someone dies, the local organ procurement organization, tissue bank or eye bank matches those donor's organs, eyes and tissues, as specified in the registry, with people waiting for transplants. Patients who receive your donation will be matched based upon many factors including: blood type, severity of illness and other medical criteria. Factors, such as race, gender, age and income are not considered when deciding who receives a transplant.

11. I am given the choice to donate for transplant and/or research. What does "research" mean?

"Research" means making recovered organs, eyes and tissues that are not able to be transplanted offered to doctors and scientists to help cure diseases. If "transplantation and research" is selected, first priority is finding a suitable recipient before research is considered.

12. Is the registry used for whole body donation?

No. Joining the New York State Donate Life Registry does not grant permission for your body to be donated to medical schools. Organ, eye and tissue donation for transplant or research is not the same as willed whole body donation. These Willed whole body programs are usually associated with teaching hospitals at major universities, and planning for this must be done in advance directly with the institutions. Individuals can also contact the Association of Medical Schools of New York at 212-218-4610.

13. Can my body be donated for the study of science after donation of organs and tissue?

Each medical school has its own guidelines about accepting body donations. Not all schools will accept body donations after organ, eye and/or tissue donation. If you are interested in willed whole body donation, check with the academic institutions you wish to support. They can answer specific questions about organ and tissue donation and pre-arrange the donation of your body for the advancement of science.

14. Can I specify who receives my donation?

You are allowed to direct a donation to an individual by name. If the organ is a suitable match for a person who is waiting for a transplant, they can receive the transplant as a gift. You cannot restrict a donation on the basis of age, gender, race or ethnicity.

15. How can I make changes to my information or withdraw from the Donate Life Registry?

If you need to make changes to your information or you decide you do not want to become an organ, tissue and eye donor and you want your name taken off the Donate Life Registry, write to:

- *The New York State Donate Life Registry
New York State Department of Health
875 Central Avenue
Albany, NY 12206.*

16. I want the Donor Heart Symbol added to (or removed from) my DMV driver's license or ID How do I get a new one?

In order to get the heart symbol added to or removed from your ID, you will need to order a new one. Please complete an MV-44 at the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV). You can download this form <http://www.dmv.ny.gov/forms/mv44edl.pdf> or go to your local DMV office.

17. When must organs be recovered?

Organs, eyes and tissues must be recovered as soon as possible after death.

18. If I donate my organs, eyes and tissues can I still have an open casket viewing?

Donation does not affect the funeral arrangements or viewing.

19. Is there any cost to my estate or family for donating my organs, eyes and tissues

No, there are no costs to your estate or family for you to be a donor.

20. If I donate, does New York State take care of my remains?

After the donation has taken place, families are responsible for funeral or burial arrangements.

21. What does my religion say about organ and tissue donation?

All major religions approve of organ, eye and tissue donation and transplantation, and even encourage it. They believe it is the most significant gift one human being can give to another. If you have questions or concerns, you should discuss them with your religious or spiritual leader. For specific religious viewpoints, please visit <http://www.donatelifeny.org/just-for-you/religious-leaders-and-clergy/>.

22. If I am registered as a donor in New York, but die in another State, what happens?

Hospitals in all states are required to alert their federally designated Organ Procurement Organization (OPO) of every death. Therefore, if one dies in another state, that state's OPO will contact the OPO of the person's home state to check if he or she has joined the Donate Life registry. If so, New York laws apply, but the donation will take place in the state in which the person has died.

23. Can I join more than one state registry?

Yes, anyone who spends a portion of time in New York State who would like to be an organ, eye and tissue donor should join the New York State Donate Life Registry, even if his or her home address is not in New York State.