



MICHIGAN ORGAN & TISSUE DONATION PROGRAM



Michigan Organ Donor Registry: Common Questions

Note: As always, Gift of Life Michigan and the Michigan Eye-Bank encourage clerks to direct customers to contact our organizations if they have questions or want information about organ, tissue and eye donation. But this document addresses some of the main questions the public may ask regarding donation.

Q: Can I register if I have a medical condition, such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease? Can I register if I have used drugs or drink a lot?

Answer: Anyone can join the Donor Registry, regardless of their health or lifestyle history. A medical professional determines, after a person's death, what can be used to help others. Constant medical advances mean that a condition that may prevent transplantation today may not prevent it in the future.

Q: Are there any age restrictions? What's the minimum age? Can a minor register with parental consent?

Answer: There are no age restrictions to join the registry. Minors may register, with or without parental consent, but their parents have final say on whether a donation will actually be carried out until the youth turns 18. There is no upper age limit to join the registry – in fact, people in their 100s have donated!

Q: Does it cost anything to register or to be a donor?

Answer: No. There is no cost to the individual, the family or a person's estate.

Q: Will the deceased be presentable for an open casket funeral?

Answer: Yes. The body is treated with dignity and respect, and nothing in the donation process would preclude any type of arrangement, including an open casket.

Q: Will medical staff do everything possible to save a person's life, knowing the individual is an organ donor?

Answer: Yes. The people treating the patient – ambulance crews, emergency room doctors and nurses, the attending physician – are completely separate, by law, from those involved in the donation and transplantation of organs, tissue and corneas.

Q: Can I choose which organs I donate?

Answer: Joining the Michigan Organ Donor Registry gives consent for all usable organs and tissues. However, a person may create a separate statement (signed, dated and accessible to the family in the event of death) indicating specific organs or tissues. Many who ask about specifying “gifts” mistakenly limit their options. For example, a smoker might say “no” to donating their lungs, even though only a doctor would know if the lungs were suitable for transplant. People who wear glasses may incorrectly assume they couldn't donate their corneas to help someone receive the gift of sight.

Q: How will officials know I am a donor?

Answer: Every death in a Michigan hospital is reported to Gift of Life, as required by federal law. At that time, Gift of Life checks the Donor Registry, a confidential database, to see if the individual has documented a decision to help others through donation.

Q: Will my name be released as a donor or will I remain anonymous?

Answer: Donation is a medical procedure, so both Michigan law and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) ensure the privacy of a person's name on the registry. Gift of Life Michigan is responsible to these laws and to additional privacy regulations. The Donor Registry is not searched for a specific name unless information has been received that a person is deceased or if the person wishes their name removed from the Donor Registry.

Q: Do I need to tell my family my wishes? Can my family contest this? Does my family have the final say?

Answer: Michigan, like nearly every other state, has a “first-person consent” Donor Registry. That means an individual’s decision to help others must be upheld, if medically possible, and cannot be overturned by a family member or other loved one. It is always a good idea to share the decision to join the Donor Registry with family so they are aware of the decision to give the gifts of life, sight and mobility. Gift of Life and Michigan Eye-Bank staff work closely with donor families – whether their loved one was on the Donor Registry or not – to explain the process and comfort them in their time of grief.

Q: Can I change my mind and remove my name from the Donor Registry?

Answer: Yes, anyone can remove their name from the registry by contacting Gift of Life Michigan, which then works with Secretary of State administration to make the change.

Q: If I have a “Do Not Resuscitate” order, will I have to be on a ventilator to donate organs?

Answer: A ventilator is needed to keep organs viable for transplant, but is not required for the donation of tissues and corneas. If the “DNR” does not state that the person would allow a ventilator for the purposes of organ donation, Gift of Life and physicians meet with the family to let them make the decision how to proceed. In most cases, people who ask for a “DNR” in their medical directive are thinking about long-term implications, not the relatively short timeframe involved in organ donation. The family is presented with all of the information, and their decision is followed.

Q: Will being an organ donor delay my funeral arrangements?

Answer: Donation may extend the timeframe from 12 to 24 hours, with some slight variation. Gift of Life and the Michigan Eye-Bank work closely with funeral homes to keep them informed of a donor’s status.

Q: Must I be an American citizen to be an organ donor?

Answer: No. But only people with a valid Michigan driver’s license or state ID will receive a red heart sticker or emblem when they join the Donor Registry.

Q: If I donate my body to science, can I donate my organs? How do I donate my whole body to science?

Answer: The Donor Registry applies to donation of organs, tissues and eyes, not to whole body donation for scientific research. Centers for whole body study are located at Michigan medical schools and legal arrangements must be made with those schools. At the time of death, Gift of Life works closely with the family and these schools to ensure that a person's wishes, both to be a donor and to donate their body for study, can be fulfilled.

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Michigan Eye Bank
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