

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Statistics and Data**

- Over 115,000 people in the U.S. are waiting for a life-saving organ transplant.
- On average, 18 people die each day waiting for a life-saving organ transplant.
- One organ, eye, and tissue donor can save or enhance the lives of over 50 people.

## **Does organ, eye, and tissue donation really help people?**

- Organ transplants are life-saving operations. People on the transplant waiting list are dying of conditions like heart failure and kidney disease, and most will die without the help of a generous organ donor.
- Tissue transplants are life-saving and life-enhancing operations. Tissue transplants save the lives of recovering burn victims, help blind people see and help people walk again.
- Post-transplant, organ, eye, and tissue recipients can live healthy, active lives that weren't possible when they were ill. Most recipients make such an amazing recovery; you wouldn't know they'd received a transplant unless they told you.

## **Who can be a registered organ, eye, and tissue donor?**

- While age and medical history are factors, almost anyone can be considered for organ, eye, and tissue donation.
- Decisions about medical suitability for donation are made, at the time of death, by a recovery organizations medical staff, not hospital medical staff.
- Everyone, regardless of age or medical history, is encouraged to register as a donor.

## **How do I become a registered organ, eye, and tissue donor?**

### *How to become a registered donor in Montana and Washington*

- Register online at [www.lcnw.org](http://www.lcnw.org).
- Call toll-free at 1-877-275-5269 and request a brochure to fill out and return.
- Say YES to donation when renewing your driver's license. Residents who already have a heart on their driver's license are automatically added to the LifeCenter Northwest Registry.

### *How to become a registered donor in Alaska*

- Register online at [www.alaskadonorregistry.org](http://www.alaskadonorregistry.org)
- Call toll-free at 1-800-719-LIFE and request a brochure to fill out and return.
- Say YES to donation when renewing your driver's license. Residents who already have a heart on their driver's license are automatically added to the Alaska Donor Registry.

### *How to become a registered donor in Idaho*

- Register online at [www.yesidaho.org](http://www.yesidaho.org)
- Call the Idaho Donor Registry toll-free at 1-866-937-4324
- Say YES to donation when renewing your driver's license. Residents who already have the word DONOR on their driver's license are automatically added to the Idaho Donor Registry.

## **What organs, eyes, and tissues can be donated?**

- Organs: heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, pancreas and small intestines.
- Tissues: corneas, bone, blood vessels, heart valves, skin, veins, tendons and ligaments.
- Please see the Donation Resources page for specific information on blood donations.

### **Can I set limitations on the organs, eyes, and tissues I would like to donate?**

- Saying yes to donation on your driver's license indicates your consent for all organs, eyes, and tissues, for transplant and research. This does not include Whole Body donation.
- If you'd like to set limits, such as ruling out specific organs, eyes, or tissues, indicating transplant, research or both, you must either request a brochure or register online.

### **What if I change my mind?**

- Your most recent access to the registry, whether via your driver's license, sending in a brochure or accessing the registry online, is the information maintained in the registry.
- If you alter your record or decide to remove yourself, that will override any past information.
- To remove yourself from the registry, say no to donation when you renew your license or call the registry agency in your area to request removal.

### **Where does organ, eye, and tissue donation happen?**

- Donation occurs at a medical facility after death is declared and consent for donation is obtained from the donor registry or the deceased's next of kin.
- LifeCenter Northwest works with over 190 hospitals throughout our donor service area of Alaska, Montana, North Idaho, and Washington.

### **Does the donor's family incur the cost of donation?**

- There is *no cost* to the donor's family for organ, eye, and tissue donation.
- All costs related to donation are paid by the donation agency.
- Expenses related to saving the individual's life and funeral expenses remain the responsibility of the donor's family.

### **What if an individual registered to be a donor, but family is opposed to donation?**

- State and federal laws support the donor's rights.
- If an individual has recorded their personal donation decision, it *must* be honored, whether or not the next of kin agree with donation or not\*.
- Information about their loved one's decision will be communicated to the family members before donations occur, and they will be supported throughout the donation process.
- Making sure your family is already aware of your donation decision helps to prevent more stress during their time of loss.
- Most families are happy to know their loved one had made a decision and want to follow through on their final wishes.

\* If there is evidence that the person had changed their mind, but had not documented their decision, this will be taken into account before proceeding with donation.

### **Can the donor family meet the recipient(s)?**

- Organ, eye, and tissue donation is a confidential process. No pressure is placed on donor families or transplant recipients to meet or make contact with one another.
- Shortly after donation, the donor family and recipient(s) will receive general information about one another (age, sex, occupation, general location). No identifying details are shared unless consent has been given by both parties.
- Recovery Organizations and the transplant centers can arrange contact if the desire is mutual.

### **How is the organ allocation process determined?**

- If someone needs an organ transplant, his or her name is added to the National Transplant Waiting List.
- United Network of Organ Sharing (UNOS), the organization in charge of the waiting list, works with LifeCenter Northwest coordinators to match available organs to recipients in need.
- Through extensive testing, coordinators obtain information about blood type and genetic make-up for each transplantable organ.
- This information provides a list of suitable recipients, considering such factors as medical urgency, tissue type, length of time on the waiting list, blood type, and body size.
- Location is also considered in placement. Organs are offered in LifeCenter's service area first (Alaska, Idaho, Montana and Washington). If a suitable match is not found, the organs are offered regionally, then nationally.
- *There is no discrimination due to age, sex, ethnicity, membership, occupation or social and/or financial status when determining who receives an organ.*

### **Where do organ transplants happen?**

Transplants occur only at hospitals that specialize in transplant surgery. In this region, there are five transplant centers, each with programs specializing in different organs.

- Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center – kidney, heart, liver, small intestine
- Sacred Heart Medical Center – heart, kidney
- Swedish Medical Center – kidney, pancreas
- University of Washington Medical Center – heart, lungs, liver, kidney, pancreas, small intestine
- Virginia Mason Medical Center – kidney, pancreas

### **Will doctors still try hard to save a patient who they know is a registered donor?**

- There is no conflict between saving lives and using organs, eyes, and tissues for transplantation.
- The doctors who work to save your life are not the same doctors involved in the recovery and transplantation.
- It is only after every attempt has been made to save your life – and death has been determined – that the donation process begins.

### **Will donation affect an open casket funeral?**

- Organ, eye, and tissue donation is a delicate surgery and does not disfigure the body.
- An open casket funeral is still possible.
- A LifeCenter coordinator will address specific funeral-related questions with each family before donation occurs.

### **Can organs, eyes, and tissues be given to different ethnic groups or individuals of the opposite sex?**

- Gender does not influence the allocation of donated organs, eyes, or tissues.
- Although it is possible for a candidate to match a donor from another ethnic group, transplant success rates increase when organs are matched between members of the same ethnic background.
- Ethnic minorities make up more than half the people on the National Transplant Waiting List.

### **Are organs bought and sold on the black market?**

- According to the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act of 1984, human organs cannot be bought or sold in the United States. Violators are subject to fines and imprisonment.
- “Black market” sale is impossible because recovered organs must be rigorously tested to be appropriately matched to a fitting recipient.
- Organs are distributed according to national policy established and monitored by UNOS.

### **Are there religious objections to donation?**

- Most major Western religions support donation as a humanitarian act of giving. Transplantation is consistent with the life-preserving traditions of these faiths.
- To learn more about the specific statements surrounding donation visit [www.lcnw.org/understanding-donation/religion-and-donation](http://www.lcnw.org/understanding-donation/religion-and-donation).

### **How can I become a living kidney donor?**

- A living kidney donor is someone who donates one kidney from their own living body. A living kidney donor’s remaining kidney will do the work of two kidneys, while their donated kidney will do the same inside the transplant recipient.
- If you know someone who needs a living kidney donation, you should contact that person’s transplant center.
- If you do not have a specific patient in mind or want to give anonymously, you can contact any of the transplant centers in our region, they all have anonymous living kidney programs:

*University of Washington Medical Center*  
206-598-3627

*Swedish Medical Center*  
1-800-996-7426

*Sacred Heart Medical Center*  
509-474-4500

*Virginia Mason Medical Center*  
1-800-354-9527 ext. 11201

### **Are living kidney donations successful?**

- Living donor transplants can provide recipients with an excellent quality of life for years.
- Completely matched sibling transplants often function well even after 25 years.
- With living donations, transplant recipients may feel better prepared because the transplant is a scheduled surgery.

### **How can I become a whole body donor?**

- Whole body donation is not a program at LifeCenter Northwest.
- When signing up to be a registered organ, eye, and tissue donor, you are not signing up for whole body donation.
- Please see Donation Resources for specific state information on whole body donation.