



MICHIGAN ORGAN & TISSUE DONATION PROGRAM

Organ Donation: What is Brain Death?

Death occurs in two ways:

1. **Cardiac death**—occurs when the heart stops beating. (This happens to everyone.) Possible tissue donor.
2. **Brain death**—occurs when there is irreversible cessation of brain function. Only occurs for 1-2% of the population. Depends on cause of death. Possible organ donor.

Brain death exam:

1. Person must be on a ventilator. The heart is still beating, but the ventilator is needed to supply oxygen to the organs.
2. Can be determined in several ways:
 - A. No electrical activity in the brain. This is determined by electroencephalograph (EEG).
 - B. No blood flow to the brain. This is determined by blood flow studies.
 - C. No basic brain functions. This is determined by clinical studies:
 - i. No movement
 - ii. No response to stimulation
 - iii. No breathing when removed from the vent.
 - iv. No brain reflexes (pupils, blink, cough, gag)
3. 2 MDs (not from Gift of Life) do the exams, separated by 6-12 hours to confirm.

Some common causes of brain death:

1. CVA—cerebral vascular accident (aneurysm/stroke); a blood vessel in the brain ruptures and bleeds
2. MVA—motor vehicle accident
3. blunt injury—fall
4. GSW—gun shot wound
5. anoxia—lack of blood flow to the brain (drowning)

What does brain death mean?

1. There is no blood or oxygen to the brain, but the organs are getting oxygen from the ventilator.
2. The person will never regain brain function. They are NOT in a coma. They can not think or feel. Brain death is irreversible.
3. A brain dead person can give the gift of life to another through organ donation.

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