Frequently Asked Questions about the Body Donation Program at UC Davis

Please keep this page for your records or to share with your family members

Q: What is the purpose of the Body Donation Program (BDP)?
The program was established to provide human remains for scientific studies essential to teaching and research.

Q: How does the registration process work?
Upon receipt of the completed documents, the BDP will notify you regarding your acceptance as a registered donor and a wallet identification card will be sent to you. This card will have instructions for your expected survivor(s) to follow at the time of your death. They, along with your physician and/or care facility, should be notified of your wishes and informed of the contact procedure.

Q: Who can donate a body?
Any adult (18 years and older) can register with our program prior to death. If a person has died and is not registered with the program, the person appointed as power of attorney for healthcare or the decedent’s surviving spouse/registered domestic partner can sign the necessary forms.

Q: Are there reasons a body would not be accepted?
The University reserves the right to refuse a donation based on medical or pathological reasons or in the rare event that anatomical and research needs have been met. While this is an uncommon occurrence, it is important that the donor be aware of this possibility and have alternate arrangements in mind. Any condition that extensively destroys or distorts the normal anatomy of the body can make it difficult to conduct meaningful study. If any of the following situations, conditions or diseases are encountered please call the BDP for clarification.

These, if known, will result in a refusal:
- Hepatitis B or C
- Tuberculosis
- Creutzfeldt-Jacob’s disease
- HIV/AIDS
- Kuru
- MRSA/VRSA

The following reasons may result in refusal to accept; decision can only be made at the time of death:
- Autopsy
- Trauma
- Organ donation
- Obesity
- Suicide or other suspicious deaths
- Immobility or physical impairments
- Mortuary preparations
- Recent extensive surgery
- Advanced muscular atrophy
- Deaths reported after 48 hours

Q: What happens if your program cannot accept a donation?
If our program is unable to accept for almost any non-medically related reason, we will make every attempt to transfer the donation to another donor program within the UC System. These reasons may include paperwork not being sufficient for our program; the program is at capacity, etc. If a donation is rejected for a particular disease (for example hepatitis C) we would not be able to refer the donation elsewhere.
Q: How does the body get to the BDP?
At the time of death, please call the 24 hour death notification phone number located on the donor card. The service will ask a few questions for verification purposes and to determine if the body is acceptable for donation at the time of death. If the family is ready, we will go ahead and dispatch our transport service to take the donor into our care.

Q: What happens after the studies are completed?
After studies are completed, the remains are cremated and scattered or interred in a manner consistent with state law. The School of Medicine incurs all preparation, cremation and disposition expenses.

Q: Can my family have my cremated remains returned to them?
No, due to the undetermined length of time and how the body may be used for study, remains cannot be returned to the donor’s family.

Q: How does my survivor get a copy of the death certificate?
The BDP provides only the forms to obtain a certified copy of the death certificate from the Bureau of Vital Statistics in the county where death occurred. The cost of certified copies may vary by county.

Q: What happens if I change my mind?
Withdrawal from the program can be done at any time in writing.
Mail to:
Body Donation Program
UC Davis School of Medicine
4800 Broadway, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95820

Q: How do I update the BDP if I move or if my information changes or need a new ID card?
Just call the donor program staff and request an “Update Packet” and/or a new card. This information is used to file the death certificate; it is imperative that we have the most current and accurate information.

Q: What if the death occurs in another state?
The BDP can provide information on programs in other states and will work with the survivors to accomplish the wishes of the donor.

Q: Is any payment received for a donation?
No, this would be a violation of Federal Law, State Law and the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act.

Additional questions regarding the suitability of a donation for study can be clarified by calling (916) 734-9560 or by e-mailing the Body Donation Program at dbpinfo@ucdavis.edu.