



Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Organ donation saves lives

Did you know that a single organ donor can save up to eight lives and improve the lives of 75 others, who may receive tissue from a donor?

What is the difference between organ donation and tissue donation?

Organ donation is when an organ (e.g., heart, lung, kidney) is removed from one person and transplanted into another person.

Tissue donation is when tissues in the body (e.g., skin, corneas, bone) are removed from one person and transplanted into another person.

About Organ Donation

Donations from a deceased donor usually occur when the donor dies suddenly after a severe brain injury. This often happens because of a motor vehicle accident, bleeding in the brain, or a trauma such as a very bad fall.

In this case, organs can only be donated if:

- there has been severe brain damage and the person is no longer alive and the person has been maintained on a ventilator until the organs are removed.

Other times, an organ donor may be a living donor. This means that donating the organ will not harm the person. An example of this is when a brother gives one of his two kidneys to his sister or a mother gives part of her liver to her child.

About Tissue Donation

Tissues do not require the same conditions as organs to survive, so tissue donation is possible after the heart and lungs have stopped working.

Tissues for donation must be removed within 12 to 24 hours after a person dies. The donor doesn't need to be maintained on a ventilator.

Who can donate organs and tissues?

The criteria for organ and tissue donation can change and there may be certain reasons a person can't donate. It's often related to a person's medical or social history, or illnesses. The organs and tissues have to be healthy and the donor must not have any diseases that could harm the recipient.

Which organs and tissues can be transplanted?

Organs that can be donated include:

- heart
- lungs
- liver
- kidney
- pancreas
- pancreas islet cells
- small bowel
- stomach

Tissues that can be donated include:

- cornea
- sclera (white of the eye)
- heart valves
- skin
- bone
- tendons
- amniotic tissue

How many people in Canada need transplants?

- There are more than 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that will save their lives. Even more people are waiting for tissue transplants that will improve their quality of life.
- There are more than 700 Albertans on transplant waitlists.

Can I donate organs or tissues while I am still alive?

Yes. You can donate a kidney, part of the liver, or part of a lung. To learn more, ask your family doctor to refer you to a specialist, or call the Living Donor Program for more information.

There are Living Donor Programs in Calgary and Edmonton. You can make a living donation of a kidney, part of a lung, or part of a liver to someone you know at The University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton. You can make a living kidney donation at The Southern Alberta Transplant Program in Calgary.

In 2022, 491 organ transplants were performed in Alberta, exceeding the previous record of 462 set in 2017. This overall record includes 107 liver transplants and 254 kidney transplants, both records. Alberta's deceased donation rate of 21 donors per million population in 2022 was the highest ever in the province, and among the highest in Canada.

More than 844,000 Albertans have legally registered to affirm their wishes to donate their organs and/or tissues on the province's online organ and tissue donation registry since its launch in 2014. Search "organ donation registry" at myhealth.alberta.ca to find out more.

Albertans can also document their desire to donate organs and/or tissues at their local registry agent when they renew their driver's license or other identification.