

## **Cornea and tissue donation information**

Tissue donation can help thousands of people each year. Donated tissue such as skin, bones and eyes can save or dramatically improve the lives of many people suffering from illness or injury. Thanks to the generosity of donors and their families, thousands of people every year receive life-transforming tissue transplants.

Under Max and Keira's Law, the Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Act came into effect. Under the new law, all adults in England are considered as having agreed to donate their own organs when they die unless they record a decision not to donate (known as 'opting out') or are in one of the excluded groups. Those excluded include people who:

- are under the age of 18
- lack the mental capacity to understand the new arrangements and take the necessary action
- have lived in England for less than 12 months
- are not living here voluntarily
- have nominated someone else to make the decision on their behalf.

In cases, where the individual hasn't expressed a decision, our specialist teams will support families to make a decision, based on what their loved ones would have wanted. If the decision is not to donate, this will be honored and upheld.

### **Cornea donations**

Most people can register to donate their eyes. Short-sightedness or a previous cataract operation does not mean that someone cannot become an eye donor. Any donor tissue which might not be suitable for transplant can be used for medical or research purposes, with consent from the donor. People with cancer can donate their corneas, as the cornea does not have an active blood supply and therefore is not affected by most cancers. The exceptions are leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma.

People dying from conditions other than cancer may be able to donate other tissues such as:

- bone
- skin
- heart valves
- tendons
- cartilage
- femoral arteries

There are no age restrictions for:

- bone
- skin
- eyes

However, heart valves and tendons can only be donated up to the age of 60.

## **Donation process**

Following the death of a person who wishes to donate tissues, the body should be cooled within four hours, and the tissues donated ideally within 24 hours after someone has died.

When the person dies in their own home, the next of kin or GP will need to contact the National Blood and Transplant Donor Service via the details below. The Specialist Nurse Coordinator from this service will return the call and obtain further information about their medical history, and the next of kin consent.

When a person who wishes to donate tissues or corneas dies at the hospice, our staff will contact the Tissue National Referral Centre immediately following the patient's death. The retrieval team can make the necessary arrangements to honour the patient's wishes.

The removal of the corneas is carried out with the same care and respect as any other procedure. Corneas can be removed in the funeral home, the hospice, or at the hospital, but other tissues must be removed at the hospital. Once removed, the donated tissues are transferred to a tissue bank where they are examined, tested, treated, and stored until they are used in transplant operations.

This does not prevent relatives from saying goodbye or affect funeral arrangements.

## **Registering to be a tissue donor**

Registering to be a tissue donor is quick and easy and can be done online or over the phone via the details below. To be a donor after your death, you simply need to join the **Organ Donor Register** and tell your closest family and friends about your wishes.

For further information, please use the contact details below:

T: 0800 432 0559

E: [national.referral.centre@nhsbt.nhs.uk](mailto:national.referral.centre@nhsbt.nhs.uk)

[www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/)