

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Is it necessary to include a body donation in the donor's will?

No. The intent to donate may be included in a will, but because a will may not be found in time for delivery of the body to the University, it is more effective to have these instructions readily available on a wallet donation card or donation form. The donor should also advise his or her family and legal representative of the intent to make a donation.

2. Are there age restrictions on whole body donation?

No. The body of any person may be donated with appropriate consent by the donor or the donor's legal representative.

3. Will the donor or donor's family be paid a fee for a body donation?

No. The state anatomical law (RUAGL) requires that the donation be a gift without compensation.

4. Are there costs associated with body donation?

Yes. Although the University of Michigan Anatomical Donations Program does not charge a fee for its services, the donor's family or legal representative is responsible for certain costs. A funeral home must be notified at the time of death; if the prospective donor is acceptable to the program, the funeral home is responsible for transportation of the donor to The University of Michigan and will also execute all legal documents, including the death certificate, burial transit permit and the anatomical donations program paperwork. Whatever a funeral home charges for these services is the responsibility of the decedent's estate or next-of-kin. If a donor is not acceptable to the program, the family or representative is responsible for making alternate arrangements for final disposition.

5. Are there circumstances when a donation could not be used?

Yes. Medical conditions including emaciation or obesity, extensive burns, mutilation, advanced decomposition, or a history of contagious diseases (hepatitis, AIDS, Creutzfeldt-Jakob, tuberculosis, active MRSA, VRE, etc.) would

make a donated body unusable. Cause of death may also be a factor. To help avoid any surprise or disappointment, family members should be advised as early in the donation process as possible that the final determination on the suitability of a donation will be made after death.

6. What is the procedure at the time of death?

The funeral director should call the Donations Program at (734) 764-4359 promptly for instructions. Medical records will be solicited and reviewed during business hours in order to determine acceptance to the program.

7. What is the procedure if a donation cannot be used?

If an anatomical donation is not accepted for any reason, the donor's legal representative is responsible for making alternate arrangements at the expense of the donor's estate.

8. What are examples of uses for education or research?

Most donations are used to teach medical and dental students, and in continuing education programs. A small number are used to teach students in allied health fields such as nursing and physical therapy. Some donations are used for research, such as by surgeons to study new operative techniques. Some education or research, such as work to increase safety for individuals in the military, law enforcement, or sports, may involve exposures to destructive or damaging forces (e.g. impacts, crashes, ballistic injuries, and blasts). The use of donations for education or research can include photographic, video, or media images of parts of the body.

9. May an institution other than the University of Michigan use a donor's body?

Possibly. The University of Michigan Anatomical Donations Program may in its sole discretion allow a donor's body to be utilized by another institution or entity as permitted by the RUAGL for education or research. In these cases, the donor's body will then be returned to the Program for final disposition after the educational or research use is complete.

10. Is it likely that the donor's body will be used in research studying a disease the donor had?

Generally, no. Any use for research would be determined by specific researcher requests pending at the time of the donor's death.

11. What is the meaning of the terms temporary donation and permanent donation?

Temporary Donation means the donor's remains will be returned within approximately 24 months. Permanent Donation gives the University of Michigan the option to continue using donor's remains without time constraints and the ashes will be interred at the University of Michigan Memorial Garden.

12. Will the University of Michigan accept a body if the donor dies out-of-state?

Because of transportation costs, legal issues, and potential deterioration of the donor's body, we recommend that a donor's body be donated to a recipient in the area where death occurs.

13. May the donor's family have a funeral service before the donor's body is delivered to the Medical School?

Typically, yes. However, the funeral director must first contact our office, since failure to follow allowable procedures could prevent the intended donation.

14. Is it possible for an ambulance service or even the donor's family to deliver the donor's body to the Medical School?

No. A licensed funeral director must arrange for delivery of the donor's body to ensure protection of public health and compliance with all related laws and policies.

15. When will work with the donation be completed and the ashes returned?

If a donor chooses a temporary donation, work with the donation will be completed within approximately 24 months. The donor's family or funeral representative is notified by letter 2 weeks prior to the mailing of the cremated remains with a specific mailing date. This is a signature required mailing event, but if someone is not home to receive the package, the USPS will leave a written notification and the package delivery can either be re-scheduled or that package can be picked up at their local post office.

16. Is there a memorial service for the donors?

Yes. The University of Michigan Medical School conducts an annual memorial service commemorating the donors. Family members will receive an invitation to the Memorial Service, which is typically held in late September.

17. Can individual markers be purchased?

Yes. The donor or donor's legal representative should make arrangements directly with Washtenong Memorial Park. All costs are the responsibility of the donor or the donor's estate.

18. Are donors cremated after the donation process?

Yes. It is the strict University policy to cremate all donors after the donor has served their educational or research purpose.

19. Can ashes be exhumed after being buried in the University plot?

No. Ashes buried in our cemetery plot cannot and will not be exhumed under any circumstance or situation.

20. Will my family receive a report of your findings?

No. We do not conduct autopsies or maintain reports.

21. Are the ashes that are returned or buried 100% of the donor's body?

Under the majority of circumstances, yes. However, the Anatomical Donations Program does reserve the option to retain limited samples of tissues, bones and organs for future education or medical research. Two examples could be the temporal bones (e.g., a small bone located near the ear cavity) or an entire or partial organ such as the liver or heart.

22. I'm interested in becoming a donor with The University of Michigan Anatomical Donations Program. How do I get started?

The University of Michigan Anatomical Donations Program has a thoughtful and detailed informational brochure titled "The Gift of Knowledge" which outlines our program and the protocols. It is best to read and fully understand the program. If the program seems like a good match, the pre-registration document should be completed and returned. Upon receipt of this document, a confirmation letter and personalized plastic wallet card is generated. Remember—being pre-registered is the first step and does NOT guarantee acceptance into the program.