

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is human tissue donation?

Donating human tissue involves the removal of certain structures of the human body from a person who no longer has a pulse or is breathing.

Who is responsible for the removal, conservation and distribution of human tissues in Québec?

In the fall 2001, the Québec Minister of Health and Social Services entrusted this mandate to Héma-Québec, thus officially acknowledging the agency's competency in the processing and distribution of human tissue.

What tissues may be removed?

Here are examples of some of the tissues that may be removed:

Heart for valves: aortic and pulmonary valves removed along with the conduits are in great demand for pediatric recipient surgeries.

Bone tissue: some bone tissues in the lower limbs, such as the tibia, femur, fibula, iliac crest, used for several types of orthopedic surgery such as the revision of a total knee or hip prosthesis.

Skin tissue: a very thin layer of skin is removed from the back and the rear of the lower limbs. In serious burn victims, a skin graft is a deciding factor that can save a life.

Does consent imply the donation of all tissues?

It is important that family members know your wishes for tissue donation. When the time comes, your family and loved ones will be asked to identify the tissue to be removed.

Can someone become a tissue donor regardless of the circumstances of his/her death?

Each donor is subject to a stringent evaluation and the suitability of the donation is based on the results of the evaluation.

What is the age limit to be a tissue donor?

Age criteria may vary depending on the type of tissue:

- Heart valves: Females and males up to age 55
- Most other types of tissues: Females and males from age 15 to 70

How is tissue removed?

Firstly, the donor's body is treated with care and respect by the team of professionals specializing in tissue removal. The process is carried out in facilities specially designed for that purpose at Héma-Québec or at a hospital operating room, pursuant to stringent procedures that comply with Health Canada standards and those of various recognized regulatory agencies.

When does the donation process begin?

The donor eligibility process begins as soon as the family has given its consent to have the tissue removed. The tissue must be removed as soon as possible after death, in order to ensure the quality of the donated tissue.

What screening tests have to be conducted for a tissue donation?

The blood is tested to determine the donor's serologic profile (e.g., blood type, Rhesus factor, HIV, hepatitis, etc.).

What about confidentiality?

It is important to specify that the results of the analyses, much like any information obtained for donation purposes, remain confidential. Therefore, all information related to the evaluation and serological results are kept strictly confidential and are only used to determine the admissibility of a potential donor.

What happens to the tissues after they are removed?

The tissues are processed and conserved (freezing or cryoconservation, based on the type of tissue) until it is grafted. Bacteriological tests are also done on the donated tissues, in order to ensure an optimum quality graft for the eventual recipient.

How many people can receive a graft from a single tissue donation?

One cardiac tissue donor can help at least two people. A bone tissue donor can help 20 to 40 recipients.

How long after a donation may a donor's body be collected by his/her family and/or loved ones?

After obtaining the tissue donation consent, Héma-Québec generally has 24 hours at the most to release the remains.

Can the donor have an open casket funeral?

The tissue removal procedure does not alter the donor's appearance and will not prevent an open casket funeral from being held.

Can you buy or sell tissue in Canada?

Canadian legislation on tissue donation prohibits the sale of tissue for profit.

It should be noted that the cost of donation and transplant is covered by the public health system.

What is the meaning of tissue donation for the loved ones of a donor?

Nothing can replace the loss of a loved one. But often times, families say that tissue donation allowed them to give some meaning to the death of a loved one. Human tissue donation is perceived as a constructive deed even if it is the result of a tragedy.