

Request for research autopsy of patients with COVID-19: HUP ONLY

Patients who die with or from COVID-19 (+SARS-CoV-2) at HUP may donate organ tissue samples for research purposes. The intent is to collect samples for scientific discovery given the pandemic of the novel coronavirus. There is no clinical report generated and only a limited autopsy is performed. Patients must weigh less than 250 pounds to be eligible due to limited equipment and staff to perform the procedure.

Complete death documentation and autopsy procedures as otherwise instructed during the COVID-19 pandemic with the exceptions and specific information noted below.

The patient's legal decision maker should be approached to provide consent for a limited research autopsy if the patient had a confirmed +SARS-CoV-2 test and weighs less than 250 pounds. (Use the Family approach script and FAQ).

If legal decision maker is present: approach and, if willing, obtain written permission on the standard autopsy consent form, noting "research autopsy" in the restriction section.

If legal decision maker is not present: offer autopsy at the time of death notification and, if willing, obtain telephone consent for a restricted research autopsy. An additional witness, in addition to the physician or clinician obtaining consent, will need to sign. Note "research autopsy" in the restriction section.

Note: in organ donation requests, which may be similar, apologetic approaches (e.g., "I'm sorry that I have to ask you this") are less well-received by families and less likely to result in consent than confident but compassionate approaches.

Family approach script and FAQ:

We are deeply sorry for your loss. We wish you and your family strength during your time of grief.

This infection, COVID-19, is very new. We are still learning about how it harms the body and causes illness. We are still learning how to treat it. This virus has taken so much from you. We would still like to ask for your help, and your loved one's help, in helping protect others from this virus.

You and your loved one can give a generous gift that will help other people and families. We ask that you give the gift of pieces of your loved one's organs so that we can learn more about this virus. This donation would be through an autopsy procedure. This gift, and the ways that it makes medical care for others better, would become part of your loved one's legacy.

Why do you need this donation?

As a world-wide community, we are learning more about this virus every day. But we still do not understand how the body responds to the infection. Knowing how the virus causes illness can help us treat people sick with the virus, prevent the virus from spreading, and save lives. Your loved one's donation of parts of the organs would be used for research about this virus to help others.

What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is a procedure that happens soon after a person's death. In this situation, doctors would take out pieces of the internal organs through incisions in the chest and abdomen (belly). Other than the pieces your loved one donated, the remainder of the organs would stay in their body. The doctors would then close the incisions.

How long will this procedure take?

Typically, the procedure is done within one day after death. The procedure itself takes a few (2-4) hours. It is performed in the hospital by specially trained doctors.

Does donation prevent funeral viewings?

No, the procedure does not involve parts of the body that would prevent a viewing. This procedure will not delay funeral services, burial, or cremation. However, due to the world-wide spread of the virus, funeral homes may be unable to provide viewings at this time. Please discuss this with your chosen funeral home.

What tissue will you take?

The doctors will take parts of your loved one's internal organs. They will collect parts of the lungs, trachea (windpipe), heart, intestines, stomach, bone marrow, and other organs to help us learn more about the virus. They will not take any of the brain.

Do I or my loved one have to pay for this procedure?

No, donating is a gift from your loved one. You and your loved one will not be charged anything.

Will I receive any information about what they find?

No, this is a donation only for research. The doctors performing the autopsy procedure will not be able to give you specific information about your loved one.

Will my loved one's name be used?

No, your loved one's privacy will be protected at all times. Their name will not be used.

What if I say no?

You do not have to make this gift on behalf of your loved one. We will not perform any procedures without your permission. If you decline, the funeral home of your choice will pick up your loved one's body from the hospital.