

# Corneal Donation

Information for patients, families  
and carers in the Palliative Care  
Unit at Harold's Cross



## Corneal Donation

For someone facing blindness, a donated cornea can improve or restore their vision allowing them to resume a normal life. Donation is an act of great compassion and generosity, and it leaves a profound legacy. Although donation takes place at a time of sadness and loss, we hope some comfort may be found in knowing that it is an extraordinary gift, which could provide others with the chance to reclaim a full and vibrant life through the gift of sight.

## What is a corneal transplant?

The cornea is the eye's outermost layer - the clear, dome-shaped surface found at the front of the eye. It functions like a window, allowing light to pass through the eye. A corneal transplant is a surgical procedure that replaces a diseased or scarred cornea with a healthy donated cornea. Corneal transplantation is the most frequently performed transplant procedure.

## Who can donate?

Many people are potential cornea donors. Even if your eyesight is poor, your corneal tissue may be completely healthy. Age is not usually a restriction and most people with cancer are still potential donors. However, there are some exceptions such as having a blood cancer, dementia, certain types of infection and eye disease. The questions we will ask will determine if donation can take place.

## What consent is needed to donate?

Sometimes the donor may have stated their wishes before death. While this is given great weight, consent is only fully obtained when the family is also in agreement and has confirmed this after the donor's death. Consent is normally then given by what is called the 'Designated Family Person'. This could be a spouse, civil partner, son or daughter, parent or other relevant person to a donor.

In addition to obtaining consent, the Eye Bank staff will work with a donor's loved ones and their doctor to complete questions about a donor's medical and social history. This ensures the safety and suitability of the corneas for transplant. A blood sample will also be taken at the time of the cornea collection, which will be tested for the presence of infectious diseases.

## What is donated?

Using a specialised technique, only the cornea is removed from the donor. The cornea is about the size of a contact lens. If, after examination, the cornea is found not to be suitable for transplant, it may instead be used for surgical training if consent for this has been given.

## Will donation affect the appearance of the donor?

No. Great care is taken to preserve the donor's appearance. The donor's body is treated with dignity and respect at all times. Funeral arrangements, including a viewing if desired, may proceed as scheduled.

## Is there a time limit for donation?

Yes. In order to ensure that the cells in donated corneas remain healthy, collection of corneas and blood samples must take place no later than 15 hours after death. We understand donation takes place at a difficult time for relatives and friends and will endeavor to take up as little time as possible when taking consent and obtaining medical information.

## Is there a cost to the family?

No, donor families do not incur any costs related to the donation.

## Does donation affect funeral arrangements?

No. Usually families may proceed with funeral arrangements without any delay or interruption.

## Are there any religious objections to donation?

Most major religions approve of eye, organ and tissue donation and consider donation an act of charity.

## Where does the donation take place?

The procedure is carried out by clinical staff from the Eye Bank in the patient's room in the palliative care unit at Our Lady's Hospice & Care Services, Harold's Cross. This is a pilot project and unfortunately, there are not always suitably trained clinical staff available from the Eye Bank to accept donations - particularly at weekends. We very much hope to expand the project soon, such that donations can be accepted at any time.

## What is an Eye Bank?

An Eye Bank is an organisation which is committed to aiding the restoration of sight through collection, medical evaluation, storage and distribution of donated corneas. The corneas are used either for corneal transplantation or for technique development and training. Donated corneas only remain viable for 14 days, so we need a constant supply of new corneas in order to provide surgeons with transplant material at all times.

## Contact us

The Eye Bank is part of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service and is based in the National Blood Centre, on James's Street in Dublin 8. If you would like to discuss corneal donation, please contact the ward team in the palliative care unit or contact the Eye Bank directly on:

Mobile: 087 223 2875. (Mon-Fri 8am - 5pm)

Email: [tissuebank@ibts.ie](mailto:tissuebank@ibts.ie)

## Need more information?

Please scan the QR code to access the Frequently Asked Questions on our website.



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