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New York - NY Times In-Depth Report On Organ Donation: When Does Death Start?

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New York - Organ transplantation must abide by the so-called dead-donor rule: a person has to be declared dead before any vital organs can be removed. Yet organs have to be alive if there is any hope of successful transfer to a recipient. Medical professionals have handled this paradoxical situation — finding a dead body with live organs — by fashioning a category of people with beating hearts who are said to be brain-dead, usually after a traumatic head injury, and who are considered just as dead as if they had rigor mortis.

To diagnose brain death, doctors typically go through a checklist of about a dozen items, including assessing reflexes like blinking, coughing and breathing, which are all controlled by the brainstem. The criteria are extremely strict, and only a tiny fraction of severely brain-injured people meet them.

D.C.D. requires doctors to confront the shadowy question of exactly when somebody dies after the heart stops. To authorize D.C.D., doctors must follow a strict procedure.

[Read the full story at The NY Times Magazine](#)

The reporter is Darshak Sanghavi, the chief of pediatric cardiology at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

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