

## Average Wait Time for Organs in the United States

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The Matching Process → Waiting List

Organs that Can be Donated/Transplanted

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Waiting List

Here are the necessary steps to get on the national waiting list:

Obtain a referral from a physician.

Contact a transplant hospital . Learn as much as possible about the 200 plus transplant hospitals in the United States and choose one based on individual needs, including insurance, location, finances, and support group availability.

Schedule an appointment for evaluation at the transplant hospital to determine if you are an appropriate candidate for a transplant.

During the evaluation, ask questions to learn as much as possible about the hospital and its transplant team.

Once the evaluation is completed, the hospital's transplant team will determine when it is appropriate to be added to the national waiting list.

The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) maintains a centralized computer network, UNet sm , that links all organ procurement organizations (OPOs) and transplant centers. The national waiting list is maintained on UNet sm . This list is open only to transplant professionals who are members of the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network. It cannot be accessed by the public.

Patients are not notified by UNOS when they are added to the waiting list. The transplant team that did the evaluation contacts the patient in writing within 10 days and notifies the patient of the date and time their name was added to the list. The patient then directs questions about their status on the waiting list to the transplant center's transplant team.

### Who Gets a Heart?

The average national waiting time for a heart is 230 days. (UNOS/OPTN Annual Report 2003) People waiting for a heart transplant are assigned a status code, which indicates how urgently they need a heart. Because thoracic organs such as the heart and lungs can only survive outside the body for 4 to 6 hours (Partnering With Your Transplant Team (PDF), page 10), they are given first to people who live near the place where the donor is hospitalized. If no one near the donor is a match for the heart, the transplant team starts searching farther away through a series of zones in a specific sequence. See the OPTN/UNOS Allocation of Thoracic Organs Policy (PDF) for details.

### Who Gets a Lung?

The average waiting time for a lung is 1,068 days. (UNOS/OPTN Annual Report 2003) The UNOS team divides people waiting for lung transplants into two groups → people who need only one new lung and those who need two. The lung allocation system uses

clinical information – including lab values, test results, and disease diagnosis – to estimate the urgency of a candidate's need for transplant and the likelihood of prolonged survival following the transplant. This lung allocation score, as well as blood group, age, and distance from the donor hospital are considered to determine the order in which a donated lung is offered to candidate recipients. Distance is important because lungs can only survive outside the body for 4 to 6 hours (Partnering With Your Transplant Team (PDF) , page 10); they are offered first to people near the donor. If no one near the donor is a match for the lung, the transplant team starts searching farther away through a series of zones in a specific sequence. A pair of lungs will either be given to one person who needs them both, or divided between two people who need single lung transplants. See the OPTN/UNOS Allocation of Thoracic Organs Policy (PDF) for details.

#### Who Gets a Heart and a Lung?

Candidates for a heart-lung transplant are registered on both the UNOS Heart Patient Waiting List and the UNOS Lung Patient Waiting List. If a donor heart is available, the patient will receive a lung to go with it from the same donor. If the patient is eligible to receive a lung, the donor's heart will be given to the heart/lung patient as well. Because thoracic organs can only survive outside the body for 4 to 6 hours ( Partnering With Your Transplant Team (PDF) , page 10), they are given first to people near the donor. If no one near the donor is a match for the heart and lungs, the procurement team starts searching farther away through a series of zones in a specific sequence. See the OPTN/UNOS Allocation of Thoracic Organs Policy (PDF) for details.

#### Who Gets a Liver?

The average waiting time for a liver is 796 days. (UNOS/OPTN Annual Report 2003) Candidates who need a liver transplant are given a MELD/PELD score (Model for End-Stage Liver Disease/Pediatric End-Stage Liver Disease) that indicates how urgently they need the organ. A liver will be offered to the candidate with a matching tissue type and the highest MELD/PELD score first (the high score indicates the greatest need.) If the first donor's surgeon does not accept the organ then the liver specialists at UNOS will offer the liver to matched patients according to the MELD/PELD scores until the organ is accepted. Geographic factors are also taken into consideration, but livers can stay healthy outside the body for 12 to 24 hours so the UNOS liver team has greater flexibility than the teams that work with hearts and lungs ( Partnering With Your Transplant Team (PDF) , page 10). See the OPTN/UNOS Allocation of Livers Policy (PDF) for details. To learn more about how MELD/PELD scores are assigned, see the OPTN MELD/PELD calculators

#### Who Gets a Kidney?

The average waiting time for a kidney is 1,121 days. (UNOS/OPTN Annual Report 2003) When a UNOS team selects possible recipients for a donor kidney, they consider a variety of characteristics of both the donor and the recipient, including tissue match, blood type, blood antibody levels (which show how active the immune system is at the current time – too much activity increases the risk of rejection), length of time on the waiting list, whether the recipient is a child, whether the body sizes of the donor and recipient are a good match, and geographic factors. Kidneys can stay healthy outside the body for between 48 and 72 hours, so the UNOS kidney team can consider many more candidates than the heart or lung teams

#### Who Gets a Pancreas?

The average waiting time for a pancreas is 501 days. (UNOS/OPTN Annual Report 2003) The pancreas can remain healthy outside the body for 12 to 24 hours .A person who is offered a donor pancreas can be selected from people waiting for a pancreas transplant alone, a kidney-pancreas combination transplant, or a combined kidney-pancreas-islet transplant. The Islets of Langerhans are cells inside the pancreas that secrete insulin. They can be transplanted by themselves if the whole organ does not need to be used. An islet transplant is the kind of transplant that is most useful for people with diabetes whose pancreas is healthy but the Islets of Langerhans, do not make insulin. Insulin is needed to break down sugar. People who have had pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) and

have damage all through their pancreas need the whole organ. See the OPTN/UNOS Allocation of Pancreas Policy (PDF) for details.

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**[Submitted by Radical Red]**