

Pennsylvania State Coroners Association
Administrative Guideline

This guideline was developed as a recommendation for Determination of Death.

A **Standard** is the least minimum level of acceptable performance

A **Guideline or Principle** is a suggested level of performance, but not a standard

A **Best Practice** is the most rigorous level of performance and is based on current knowledge without resource limitations. (Shall; cannot deviate from; required)

According to the **“Uniform Determination of Death Act”**, Act of December 17, 1982, Section 3, it defines the determination of death as:

“Irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions” or “Irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem; is dead”

“A determination of death must be made in accordance with accepted medical standards.”

Either determination is practical and acceptable to begin an investigation if the death meets one of the eleven (11) categories which falls under 16 P.S.C.A. § 1218-B: Coroner’s Investigation.

The best practice is consistency! If your Office accepts and uses brain death or cardiac death in determining when to initiate a death investigation, it is prudent to use the same process and practice in each and every investigation, when a death occurs within a hospital setting and organ donation may be involved.

January 2023

UNIFORM DETERMINATION OF DEATH ACT
Act of Dec. 17, 1982, P.L. 1401, No. 323
AN ACT

Cl. 35

Providing for determination of death.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Short title.

This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Uniform Determination of Death Act."

Section 2. Uniformity of construction and application.

This act shall be applied and construed to effectuate its general purpose to make uniform the law with respect to the subject of this act among states enacting it.

Section 3. Determination of death.

Only an individual who has sustained either:

(1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions; or

(2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem;

is dead. A determination of death must be made in accordance with accepted medical standards.

Section 4. Effective date.

This act shall take effect in 60 days.