



**Determination Of Death**

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Approval: John Poland – Executive Director

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**General Procedures/Considerations:**

- CPR need not be initiated and may be discontinued for pts who meet Obvious Death or Probable Death criteria as contained in this protocol, at the time of initial assessment.
- A valid Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) should be honored for any pt with absent respirations, pulses and neurological response, regardless of the cause of death (e.g. terminal illness, trauma).
- Hypothermia, drug and/or alcohol overdose can mask neurological reflexes. If any doubt exists about contributing environmental factors (e.g. cold water submersion) and no valid DNR exists, initiate resuscitation and treat according to applicable S-SV EMS protocol.
- In the event of a declared MCI, death may be determined in accordance with START/JUMP START criteria.
- For all pts treated under this protocol, the following must be assessed/confirmed (as possible):
  - Absent respirations: look, listen (auscultate), and feel for respirations for a minimum of 30 secs.
  - Absent pulses: palpate both the carotid and apical pulses for a minimum of 30 secs.
  - Absent neurological response: check pupil response with a light and check for response to painful stimuli.
- If the base/modified base hospital physician directs EMS personnel to stop resuscitation efforts once transport has begun, the ambulance shall reduce transport code and continue transport to the original destination hospital.
- If determination of death is made at rendezvous location with HEMS aircraft, the body shall not be moved from the ambulance and an immediate request for law enforcement shall be made.
- If there is any objection/disagreement by family members or EMS personnel to terminating or withholding resuscitation for pts who have a valid DNR or meet probable death criteria, BLS measures (including defibrillation) shall continue or begin immediately and EMS personnel shall contact the base/modified base hospital for further direction.

**Instructions for EMS Personnel Upon Determination of Death:**

- If not already on scene, request law enforcement
- Minimize contact with the body and scene to protect potential crime scene evidence
- Appropriate EMS personnel shall remain on scene until released by law enforcement
- Provide law enforcement with the following minimum information:
  - Unit ID
  - Name and certification/license # of EMS provider determining death
  - Patient demographics and known, pertinent medical history
  - Determination of death date and time
- At a minimum, the PCR must include the following:
  - Time of determination of death
  - Six-second cardiac monitor strip of two (2) leads for pts meeting probable death criteria

**See page 2 for Determination of Death Assessment Criteria**



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**Determination of Death Assessment Criteria**  
**(all pts must have absent respirations, pulses & neurological response)**

**BLS**

- Assess for the presence of one (1) or more of the following **Obvious Death Criteria**:
  - Decapitation
  - Decomposition
  - Incineration of torso and/or head
  - Exposure, destruction and/or separation of the brain or heart from the body
  - Rigor mortis – if determination of death is based on rigor mortis, EMS personnel must 1) confirm muscle rigidity of the jaw by attempting to open the mouth & 2) confirm muscle rigidity of one arm by attempting to move the extremity

EMS personnel may determine death\*

Does pt meet Obvious Death Criteria or have a valid DNR?

←YES

NO

Are ALS personnel on scene?

NO

Initiate resuscitation & treat per applicable S-SV EMS protocol(s)

YES

**ALS**

- Assess for the presence of one (1) or more of the following **Probable Death Criteria**:
  - Lividity or Livor Mortis & cardiac monitor showing asystole in two (2) leads
  - Blunt or penetrating trauma & cardiac monitor showing asystole in two (2) leads
  - Blunt trauma & cardiac monitor showing PEA at a rate  $\leq 40$ /min

EMS personnel may determine death\*

Does pt meet Probable Death Criteria or have a valid DNR?

←YES

NO

Initiate resuscitation & treat per applicable S-SV EMS protocol(s)

\*Once EMS personnel have determined death, they shall follow the 'Instructions for EMS Personnel Upon Determination of Death' contained on page 1 of this protocol