



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH
EMERGENCY
MEDICAL SERVICES

EMS POLICY	508
Effective:	April 2025
Approval: EMS Director Travis Kusman, MPH	Signed: 
Approval: EMS Medical Director Greg Gilbert, MD	Signed: 

SEARCH FOR DONOR CARD

I. PURPOSE

This policy establishes a requirement that prehospital providers make a reasonable search for a document of anatomical gift, other information identifying the patient as a donor, or an individual who has declined to make an anatomical gift, “upon providing emergency medical services to an individual, when it appears that the death of that individual may be imminent. This requirement shall be secondary to the requirement that ambulance or emergency medical personnel provide emergency medical services to the patient.” No search is to be made by emergency medical personnel after the patient has expired.

II. AUTHORITY

Health and Safety Code § 7150.55

III. DEFINITIONS

Imminent Death: A condition wherein illness or injuries are of such severity that in the professional opinion of EMS personnel, death is likely to occur before the patient arrives at the receiving hospital. For purposes of this policy, this definition does not include any conscious patient regardless of the severity of illness or injury.

Reasonable Search: A brief attempt by prehospital personnel to locate documentation that may identify a patient as a potential organ donor, or one who has refused to make an anatomical gift. This search shall be limited to a wallet or purse that is on or near the individual to locate a driver license or other identification card with this information. This requirement may be met by asking a family member, if one is present, about the presence of an organ donor card. A reasonable search shall not take precedent over patient care/treatment.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. When EMS field personnel encounter an unconscious adult patient for whom it appears death is imminent (that is, death prior to the arrival of the patient at a receiving facility), they shall attempt a "reasonable search" of the patient's belongings to determine if the individual carries information indicating the patient's status as an organ donor. This search must be done in the presence of a witness, preferably a law enforcement officer.

B. Emergency medical treatment and transport of the patient remains the highest priority for prehospital personnel. This search shall not interfere with patient care or transport.

1. If a document of anatomical gift or evidence of declination to make an anatomical gift is located by prehospital personnel, and that individual is taken to a hospital, the

hospital shall be provided with the documentation. In situations where the investigating law enforcement officer has requested the card, hospital notification of documentation found will meet this requirement.

2. If prehospital personnel are unable to perform a search due to overriding medical care priorities or sensitivity concerns at the scene or during transport, the hospital shall be notified that the search has not been performed along with surrounding circumstances.
3. Details of any search including witnesses, what was found and who was notified shall be documented in the Electronic Health Record (EHR) completed for the patient.
4. Most importantly, a completed EHR that describes the circumstances and timing of events leading to the patient's condition as well as prehospital patient care delivered are critical to hospital personnel responsible for anatomical gift decisions.