Guidelines for declaring brain death: Centre's directive

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News

The **Union Health Ministry** asked States to make sure hospitals follow the **National Brain Stem Death Certification Guidelines (Edition I, 2026)** (5 Oct 2026). Issued in August 2026, they set one uniform, legally sound procedure across India to boost **deceased organ donation**.

Key facts

Who certifies	A **board of 4 doctors** (under the transplant law's rules)
Tests	**Two sets of clinical tests**, at least **6 hours apart** for adults
Includes	Pupil response to light, basic reflexes, the **apnoea test**; reversible causes ruled out first
Issued by	**NOTTO** (National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation), under the DGHS
Benefit	One donor can save **up to 8 lives**; hearts and lungs come only from deceased donors

Background

- **Brain stem death** is the **irreversible** loss of brain stem function; even if a ventilator keeps the heart beating, it is **death** in law. A coma or vegetative state is different.

- **Law:** the **Transplantation of Human Organs Act 1994** recognised brain death; a **2011 amendment** added tissues (THOTA); the **2014** rules set the four-member board: hospital in-charge, an approved independent expert, a neurologist/neurosurgeon and the treating doctor.
- **Health is a State List** subject (Seventh Schedule, List II, entry 6), so the Centre **advises States**.
- **Indian Organ Donation Day: 3 August** (since 2023; earlier 27 November); NOTTO runs awareness drives.

Tamil Nadu link: After student **Hitendran's** organs were donated in Chennai in **2008**, Tamil Nadu started India's first government **deceased-donor programme**, now run by **TRANSTAN** (Transplant Authority of Tamil Nadu). Since **September 2023** donors receive **State honours** at their funerals. Tamil Nadu has won the national award for organ donation many times.

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