



Tissue Donation: Guidelines for Veterinarians and Clinics

Donor Criteria:

- 1) Donors must be young to middle age:
 - Canines: up to 10 years of age.
 - Equines: up to 25 years of age.
- 2) Weight Consideration:
 - Canines: at least 50 pounds (23 kg) (at ideal body weight).
 - Equines: at least normal body weight for their age/breed.
- 3) Health Criteria:
 - Donors must be in good systemic health.
 - Vaccines:
 - (a) Donors ideally should be current on vaccines.
 - (b) Donors should not have received vaccinations within the past 2 weeks.
 - (c) If no vaccination records are available, or the donor is not vaccinated, we will try to obtain records and/or do extra testing using PCR for the vaccine viruses.

Canines: rabies, distemper, hepatitis, and parvovirus
Equines: rabies and tetanus
 - Exclusions:
 - (a) malignancies,
 - (b) septicemia, bacteremia,
 - (c) autoimmune disorders,
 - (d) ingestion of toxic substances,
 - (e) recent exposure to or history of rabies, distemper, or parvovirus,
 - (f) recent receipt of blood or blood products, or non-autologous stem cell therapies
 - (g) general unexplained lethargy or malaise.
 - Animals with acute trauma (including fractures), hip dysplasia, lameness, arthritis, or other bone-involved conditions, such as osteochondritis dissecans or subchondral cysts, may be acceptable as bone donors, as long as the condition is not contagious or transmissible.



Please call (800) 558-5223 to consult with us.

Logistics & How to Proceed

We would like to be involved with final determination of donor suitability, (we recognize that this may not always be possible), and also involved with coordination of the recovery of the donor. This is usually done over the phone with someone from your clinic. We have someone available 8 am – 6 pm (Eastern Time); they should be able to respond within 30 minutes.

Consent

If the donor seems suitable (good health, etc. as listed above) and the owner wishes to proceed, they should be **given 2 copies of the VTS Consent for Donation form** to review and sign (or have them sign one original and make a copy). Please hold one copy for us to pick up when we come for the donor, the other is for the owner to keep. If it's more convenient, we can be involved with obtaining consent, for example: if the owner has indicated they want to donate, but has left the clinic without signing the consent form.

Initial Living Health Assessment

To assist with evaluation of the tissues for transplant, we ask that the vet who is present at the euthanasia make a brief clinical evaluation of the pet to look for observable evidence of transmissible disease and sign the Initial Living Health Assessment statement on the bottom of the **VTS Donor Information Sheet** that we will provide.

Blood Samples

We will need to have you draw a **blood sample (2 red top tubes & 2 lavender top tubes)** for us to test.

- We test for transmissible diseases in the same way blood donors are tested. These tests include CBC & Chem screen as well as PCR tests for: Anaplasma, Mycoplasma, Rickettsia, Ehrlichia, Leishmania, Babesia and Bartonella species in canines. Equines are additionally tested for nearly 20 different viruses including West Nile, Herpes, Encephalitis, Influenza, Pigeon Fever, and various protozoal agents. We also archive serum and cell samples in case further tests are required.

Coordination of the Recovery

A suitable time for VTS to arrive will be arranged with you or your clinic staff during the donor referral process.

When we arrive, we will need to have **copies of all available vaccination and medical records**. These items can be emailed or we can pick these up when we arrive to collect the donor's body, consent, and blood sample.



Having a Conversation with a Family

Broaching the Subject

Tissue donation might be an appropriate and helpful option to offer to your pet owner.

If a pet appears to be within the criteria and you think the family might feel positively about tissue donation, we suggest that you consider offering this option to the owner. It may bring them more relief than you know.

- The subject of tissue donation can be broached as part of the aftercare wishes discussion. You could:
 - Ask what their thoughts on organ and tissue donation are.
 - Almost everyone has heard of organ and tissue donation for humans and drawing this comparison helps them to understand that this could be an option for their pet as well.
 - They may find that tissue donation gives them some extra comfort, by way of knowing that their beloved pet will be able to help other pets.
- A pet owner might bring up their interest in tissue donation or ask if there is anything that can be done to help others or to help research.
 - You could let them know that your clinic partners with VTS, which has a donor program much like those for human organ and tissue transplants.
- If they want to know more, you could give them the Tissue Donation brochure to review.

Important Questions Pet Owners Might Have:

How does this work?

- They will be asked to sign a consent form to permit VTS to recover tissues, do some testing, and collect their pet's medical records.
 - Owners don't usually ask, but in case they do, we generally recover the corneas to help preserve sight in other pets, the long bones of the limbs, and tendons, as these are most needed by other veterinary patients. Grafts are used in orthopedics, dentistry and ophthalmology.
- They can have plenty of time with their pet at their last moments. There is not an urgent time requirement.
 - As long as we can begin recovery-related procedures within four hours of death.
 - It might help your pet owner to remind them that there is no pain or suffering for their pet as this tissue recovery procedure is performed only after the heart has stopped beating.
- VTS will contact them in the next few days to review their pet's social/medical history and answer any questions they might have.

Can we still have a memorial for our pet? YES

- If they wish to have paw print memorials, the clinic should create these prior to VTS's arrival for pick-up.
- They can choose to have their dog cremated after tissue donation, at no cost.
 - If the family wishes, they can opt for a private cremation and return of the ashes, with costs covered by VTS.
 - This process can take an additional 1-2 weeks.
 - If they do not opt for the above, or if it's an equine donor, we send the remains for non-private cremation and the ashes are not returned.

How much does this cost?

- There is no additional cost to the owner for choosing tissue donation.

Is this safe?

- We will be collecting medical records and performing rigorous testing to make sure that everything we recover is safe to transplant into another pet.

If the family chooses to proceed with tissue donation

Please be sure to gather the following from the owner:

- A signed consent form.
- A good time within the next few days for VTS to contact them to review their pet's social/medical history and answer any questions they might have.
 - We will contact them using the phone number(s) they provide on the consent form.
- If they would prefer a private cremation with ashes returned to them (cats or dogs only).

Frequently Asked Questions by Clinicians

How much time do we have after death until tissue recovery needs to begin?

We need to recover tissue grafts within 12 hours of death (or have the donor's body in a freezer within 4 hours). Therefore, we do not necessarily need to be there at the time of death. This means that the owner can be with their pet at that time if they prefer, and we do not need to disturb them (*see above section*).

For canines, we generally like to pick up the donor within an hour or two of asystole, or soon after the owner has left. If the death is unscheduled and we are unable to pick up the donor's body immediately, we may ask you to place their body in the freezer, if possible, for us to pick up the following morning.

For equines, we will need the use of a treatment room or surgical space at your facility in order for our team to recover the tissues aseptically.

Where does the tissue recovery take place?

Unless the donor is equine, we move the body to our facility where we have specially-designed operating rooms to perform the surgical recovery of the tissue grafts. If the donor is equine, we perform on-site recovery.

Can VTS perform the euthanasia procedure?

No, this must be performed in your clinic and is part of the interaction between you and your client. The euthanasia costs are not part of the donation procedure, because we in no way want to encourage owners who may be vacillating about considering euthanasia to choose donation as a means to have euthanasia costs covered. Tissue donation is an option only after the difficult decision for euthanasia has been made.

Tissue Donation: Brief Step-by-Step Guide

If you believe a donor will be suitable and the family could be amenable to participating in tissue donation, please follow these procedures.

1. Call VTS at (800) 558-5223 to discuss details of the case.
 - a. VTS can send a Consent for Donation form and the Living Health Assessment Statement.
2. Discuss the option of tissue donation with the owner(s). While you are with them:
 - a. review and have them sign the Consent for Donation form (2 copies: 1 for VTS & 1 for owner/chart).
 - b. find out a good day or time for VTS to contact them in the next few days to review social/medical history and answer any questions they might have.
 - c. ask if they would prefer a private cremation.
 - d. ask if they have any other questions or if they would like to talk with VTS right away.
3. Review and sign the Living Health Assessment Statement.
4. Call VTS to let us know that donation is proceeding and arrange for a pick-up time.
 - a. If pick-up is not scheduled to occur within 4 hours of death, place the body in a freezer.
5. Draw blood samples from the donor:
 - a. 2 red top tubes
 - b. 2 lavender top tubes

We highly suggest drawing after sedation and prior to euthanasia, but there are other options.
6. Collect hard copies of all available vaccination and medical records, along with the signed consent form.
7. When VTS arrives, have someone guide them to the:
 - a. blood tubes
 - b. signed consent form and living health assessment, and all medical records
 - c. donor's body

Please call us if you have any questions. We can be reached at (800) 558-5223.

Thank you for your efforts to assist us and the pets needing transplant grafts!

