

## Determination of Death

It is the policy UnityPoint Health EMS System that resuscitation need not be initiated when death has been determined. Prehospital providers will determine death based on pre-determined criteria outlined below. An assessment by an ILS/ALS provider or consultation with Medical Control is required for determination of death not covered in this policy.

A person is presumed dead on arrival when all physical exam findings of death are present and at least one associated "Finding Confirmatory of Death" is present.

**Physical Exam Findings (All must be present):**

Unresponsive  
Unresponsive pupils  
Apnea  
Pulseless

**Finding Confirmatory of Death (at least one must be present):**

Lividity and/or any degree of generalized cyanosis  
Rigor mortis  
Presence of venous pooling in the body  
Decomposition  
Decapitation  
Incineration or extensive full thickness burns  
Major blunt or penetrating trauma

**Do not initiate resuscitation in the following:**

**Do Not Resuscitate orders:** No resuscitation efforts should be initiated when the person or family has evidence of a valid Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order in hand. **Remember the POLST forms may not be a true DNR.**

**Scene safety:** The physical environment is not safe for the EMS providers to enter.

**Infant death (SIDS):** An infant who is apneic, and meets the above criteria may be presumed dead.

**Neonate death:** A neonate who is apneic, pulseless, and exhibits neonatal skin maceration (softening or degeneration of the tissues after death in utero), anencephaly (absence of a major portion of the brain, skull, and scalp), or if the gestational age is less than 22 weeks and neonate shows signs of obvious immaturity (translucent and gelatinous skin, lack of fingernails, fused eyelids) may be presumed dead.

**Notes:**

Resuscitation may be initiated if the condition of the scene indicates that withholding resuscitation could cause a potential unsafe condition for the ambulance crew. **Medical Control needs to be informed of the situation as soon as the crew is safe.**

If the EMS providers determine the situation warrants removal of the patient from the scene, resuscitation efforts must be initiated and continued throughout transportation to the hospital and the details documented in the patient care report.