



## **LifeNet Health, NASA, and UNOS Complete First-of-Its-Kind Drone Kidney Transport Study to Help Save More Lives**

June 15, 2026 (HAMPTON, VA) — Teams from the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), NASA Langley Research Center, and LifeNet Health successfully completed a groundbreaking study transporting human kidneys by drone beyond visual line of sight, marking a major milestone in the future of organ transportation and transplantation.

The June 5 flights highlight the potential for drone technology to support future innovations in organ transportation, with the goal of improving reliability, reducing transit times, and helping save more lives through transplantation.

During the study, the kidneys were biopsied and placed on preservation pumps before and after the flights to assess whether drone transportation affected organ integrity.

Temperature, pressure, and altitude were monitored throughout the approximately 15-minute flights. Preliminary findings showed no evidence that the flights negatively affected the organs.

Organ transplantation is one of the most time-sensitive processes in healthcare. Once recovered, organs have only a limited window of viability, making efficient transportation critical to successful transplantation. Delays can impact organ function, patient outcomes, and whether a transplant can occur at all. Transportation innovation, including the exploration of drone technology, has the potential to expand access to transplantation for patients on the waitlist or reduce the time to transplant, improving patient outcomes.

“With more than 100,000 people currently waiting for a lifesaving transplant nationwide, innovation in organ transportation is essential,” said UNOS Interim CEO Mark Johnson.

“This successful collaboration represents an important step toward making organ transportation safer, faster, and more efficient.”

According to national transplant data, another person is added to the U.S. transplant waiting list every eight minutes, while 13 people die each day waiting for an organ that never arrives. More than 3,000 people in Virginia alone are currently waiting for a lifesaving transplant.

The kidneys used in the study were donated for research by a donor family working with LifeNet Health after it was determined the organs would not be transplanted. Through these gifts, the organizations were able to evaluate how drone transportation may support future advances in transplantation logistics and organ preservation.

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While transplantation saves lives today, donation for research helps save lives tomorrow. Organs and tissues that cannot be used for transplant can still help scientists improve preservation methods, develop new therapies, and explore future innovations in transplantation and patient care.

“Just as every patient waiting for a transplant matters, so does the timely transportation of the organs and tissues that can save and heal lives,” said Rony Thomas, President and CEO of LifeNet Health. “Advancing transportation and logistics innovation can make a meaningful difference in ensuring these lifesaving gifts reach patients when they are needed most.”

The study also highlights the broader impact of research donation. A single research donation can support multiple scientific studies and discoveries that may improve transplant outcomes and benefit patients for years to come. Many medical advances used in transplantation today were made possible through the generosity of donors and their families.

Donation for research occurs only with proper authorization and under strict ethical and regulatory standards. Families receive clear information about the process and can make informed decisions that honor their loved one’s wishes.

UNOS, NASA, and LifeNet Health continue exploring opportunities to further evaluate drone transportation in operational environments, including transporting research organs between hospitals and airports.

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### **About UNOS**

UNOS is a nonprofit organization with decades of experience in helping save lives through research, technology, innovation and education.

### **About LifeNet Health**

As a global leader in regenerative medicine, LifeNet Health continues to push the boundaries to give healing every advantage. The organization offers groundbreaking transplantation and cellular solutions that support healthcare providers and powers scientific research. This forward-focused approach has improved life for millions of patients, all while honoring donor heroes and their families. For more information, visit: [www.lifenethealth.org](http://www.lifenethealth.org).

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