

# Pre-Transplant Education

## Infection



### ***What is infection?***

An infection means something that doesn't belong in your body, like bacteria, virus, fungi or parasites, has come into your body and attacked your cells. These invaders make you sick.

### ***How does my body fight an infection?***

Your body has a special system call the immune system. The immune system is made of cells, proteins, and organs such as your spleen and lymph nodes. They all work together to find, attack and destroy invaders like bacteria and viruses.

### ***Why do I have a higher risk for infection after my transplant?***

After transplant you are on many medicines that make it hard for your immune system to fight the bacteria and viruses.

You are at the highest risk for infection for the first 6 months after transplant because you are on the highest level of medicines during this time.

### ***What types of infections are common after a transplant?***

Like everyone else, you can still get colds and flus after a transplant. However, there are some bacterial and viral infections that are more common in people who have had a transplant.

The most common bacterial infections after transplant are urinary tract infections and pneumonia.

The most common viral infections after transplant are CMV (cytomegalovirus), EBV (Epstein-Barr virus) and BKV (polyoma virus).

Uncommon types of infections after transplant are infections caused by fungi and parasites.

### ***What are the symptoms of infection?***

The most common symptoms of infection are fever, malaise (not feeling well), aches and pains.

With a urinary tract infection, it may burn when you pee and/or your pee may look cloudy.

With pneumonia, you may have a cough, chest pain or trouble breathing. Some infections could cause swelling in your lymph nodes.

### ***Can I have an infection even when I am feeling well?***

Yes, you can have an infection even if you are feeling well. This is because your immune system is unable to work as well as usual because of the high levels of medicines you will take. Some of the normal things the immune system does like causing a fever with an infection may not happen after transplant. The transplant team monitors your blood and urine for these types of infections.

### ***What happens to my kidney when I have an infection?***

Most infections are treatable if caught early. Some infections can cause damage to the transplant kidney. If not treated this could lead to loss of your kidney. The most common infection to cause kidney damage is the virus BKV (polyoma virus).

### ***How are infections treated?***

Bacteria can usually be treated by antibiotics.

There are medicines that can help you recover faster from a virus although some viruses have no treatment.

Fungi and parasites can usually be treated with medicines.

Sometimes your transplant medicines might need to be changed to help fight off an infection.



### ***How can I help prevent infections?***

Wash your hands often especially after going to the bathroom and before you eat or take your medicines.

Stay away from other people who are sick.

For the first few months post-transplant, you should not go to school or other crowded places.

Eat healthy foods.

Stay well hydrated by drinking lots of water.

Exercise regularly.

Have good sleep habits.

Get your annual flu shot and make sure your family members get their flu shot as well.

Keep your immunization status up to date. Be sure to check with the transplant team before getting any new vaccines after transplant as certain vaccines aren't safe on transplant medicines.

### ***How can I learn more about my immune system?***

Check out the Family Information Library at Children's Hospital and ask for a book on your Immune system

“Amazing body systems: Immune System”

