

ACCEPTING AN ORGAN FROM A DONOR WITH HEPATITIS C INFECTION – PATIENT INFORMATION

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is an infection that affects your liver. Hepatitis C is spread through blood (blood transfusions, needle sticks, tattoos, IV drugs). Around 500,000 people in Canada have Hepatitis C.

| What Can Hepatitis C Do? | |
|---|--|
| Short Term | Long Term |
| <p>Acute infection (hepatitis C syndrome)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feels like having the flu <p>In transplant patients</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rare -severe type of infection—yellow skin, liver swelling, liver failure | <p>Liver scarring (cirrhosis)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 15-30 years in non-transplant patients• Unknown how long it may take in transplant patients <p>Scarring can cause liver failure, need for liver transplant, liver cancer, death</p> |

Why use organs from donors with hepatitis C virus (HCV)?

There is a constant shortage of organs that can be used for transplant. There are more than 600 British Columbians waiting to get life-saving organ transplants. Accepting an organ from a donor with hepatitis C may increase your chance of getting a transplant more quickly.

Only “good” organs are accepted from donors with hepatitis C. These are usually organs from younger donors with fewer health problems other than HCV. We use strict criteria for selecting the healthiest lung organs that are infected with hepatitis C. Using organs from hepatitis C infected donors is becoming increasingly common in North America. Studies to date indicate similar outcomes compared to HCV uninfected organ transplants.

The treatment for hepatitis C is very effective and more than 95% of patients with Hepatitis C infection can be successfully treated with 12 weeks of very safe and well tolerated medications.

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How is Hepatitis C treated?

Current therapy for hepatitis C is very effective and well tolerated. Treatment involves taking one pill once daily for 12 weeks. The side effects for hepatitis C therapy are generally mild and include headache, stomach ache, and feeling tired. The cost of the hepatitis C treatment will be covered by BC PharmaCare. Your PharmaCare deductible, if any, will be covered by patient assistance programs.

After Transplant Hepatitis C Treatment

- A transplant infectious disease specialist will oversee your treatment
- You will start your antiviral treatment immediately after transplant
- Your transplant infectious disease specialist will ensure you receive the correct treatment for the strain of HCV in the donor
- You will be monitored closely for side effects
- You will be monitored closely to ensure the treatment is working
- Once you are discharged home, you will continue your treatment at home to complete 12 weeks of therapy
- If you are not cured after 12 weeks, your transplant infectious disease specialist will prescribe additional hepatitis C treatment for you.

What we don't know yet:

Q: Will all transplant patients get HCV?

Expect ~100% based on current research

Q: Will HCV drugs work as well in patients who get HCV from an organ transplant?

Yes - but this is NOT yet definitely known

Q: What is the risk of severe acute infection in transplant patients?

Likely rare (much less than 1%)

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Frequently asked questions:

Q: Can I transmit HCV to other people?

- Until you have completed treatment, you can transmit HCV to another person, through blood interaction, and rarely through sex
- Take precautions when dealing with a cut or wound that bleeds
- Use a barrier form of protection when having sexual relations while you are being treated for HCV

Q: Would the HCV drugs used cause problems with the other medications I am currently taking?

- The transplant pharmacist will review all your medications after transplant to make sure there would be no issues with the HCV treatment and your other medications/anti-rejection drugs.

Q: What if I am not cured of Hepatitis C from the drugs?

- Although we expect you will be cured, there is a possibility that the initial treatment will not cure the infection and you could develop health complications.
- Patients not cured by first-line treatment will be treated with second-line treatment.
- You will receive all necessary and appropriate treatment for HCV.

Who decides if I should accept an organ from a donor with hepatitis C infection?

The decision to accept an organ from a hepatitis C infected donor is entirely **yours**. If you decide not to accept the organ, you will not lose your place on the waiting list. If you have questions about organs from hepatitis C infected donors, discuss this with a member of your health care team while you are waiting for your transplant.

If I do not agree to accept an organ from a donor with hepatitis C infection, will it hurt my chances of getting a standard organ?

No. Everyone has a different level of how much risk they are willing to accept for themselves. The decision to accept the organ is yours. If you decide not to accept the organ, you will not lose your place on the waiting list.

