

Having a kidney or pancreas transplant from a deceased donor – information about coronavirus

This leaflet explains more about kidney or pancreas transplantation, and coronavirus (COVID-19). If you have any more questions, please speak to your transplant surgeon or kidney doctor. You should have a copy of our leaflet Having a kidney transplant from a deceased donor or Having a simultaneous pancreas-kidney transplant which explain more about the procedures, including risks, benefits and alternatives. If you have not received the relevant leaflet please ask us for one.

It is important to realise that transplantation, whenever it is done, carries some risks. These risks need to be balanced against the likely benefits of receiving a transplant from a deceased donor.

Can you get coronavirus from an organ transplant?

We think that this is very unlikely. Some deceased donors may have been cared for in intensive care units where patients with coronavirus were also being looked after. For this reason, all potential deceased organ donors undergo testing to try to rule out the presence of coronavirus. It is possible for someone to have coronavirus but for all their tests to be negative. This is unusual, but cannot be completely excluded. We, and the rest of the UK transplant community, are confident about the testing process for deceased donors. We expect the risk of catching coronavirus from a kidney or pancreas transplant is very low (probably much lower than 1 in 100 cases).

If you have a transplant, might you catch coronavirus?

We have made lots of changes to the way we work, to reduce the risk of anyone catching coronavirus in hospital. While we can lower the risk, we cannot remove it completely. This means that there is a low, but possible, chance that you could catch coronavirus by coming into the hospital for a transplant.

How likely is it you will get coronavirus after your transplant?

The risk of catching coronavirus depends on how often coronavirus is found in the general UK population, and how carefully you follow our advice on hygiene and keeping you safe. At the peak of the pandemic in March-July 2020, UK data suggested that 1 out of every 20-30 patients caught the virus soon after a kidney or pancreas transplant. We will give you the most up-to-date information when you are called in for a transplant. It is difficult to know how the risk of catching coronavirus after your transplant compares with the risk of catching coronavirus if you are regularly attending a dialysis unit. But we believe that the benefits of transplantation outweigh the risks for you.

If you catch coronavirus soon after your transplant, will it be severe?

Compared to other people, transplant patients are more likely to need to come into hospital if they catch coronavirus. Early results suggest that if a transplant patient catches coronavirus at, or very close to, the time of their operation, the risk of dying is 1 in 5 patients (20%).

What if you have no symptoms of coronavirus, but are carrying the virus when you have your transplant?

We have systems in place to stop this happening and we will not go ahead with a transplant if we think that you have coronavirus. To help us make sure that you do not have coronavirus, we will:

- give you information about protecting yourself from coronavirus while you are on the waiting list, so that the chance of you getting coronavirus is lower
- ask you about any symptoms that might suggest you have coronavirus
- examine you
- swab you for coronavirus, and we will get the result before the operation takes place.

If your swab test is negative, can you be sure that you do not have coronavirus?

The tests for coronavirus have improved, and a negative result is more reliable than it was a few months ago. However, any test may give an incorrect result in a small number of cases. This means that although a negative test is very reassuring and is probably correct, there is no guarantee.

Will the anti-rejection (immunosuppression) medications affect your risk of getting coronavirus?

We are not sure, but we think that anti-rejection medication probably increases the risk of severe illness due to coronavirus. Anti-rejection medication may increase the chance of catching coronavirus, but it is likely that most of the risk of catching coronavirus depends on how coronavirus is circulating in the UK population, and how carefully you follow our advice on hygiene and keeping you safe.

If you catch coronavirus after a transplant, will it have any effect on the transplant itself?

This is not certain, but if you become severely ill and need hospital treatment, the kidney or pancreas transplant function may get worse, as it would in any transplant patient who is seriously ill. Sometimes when a person is seriously ill, we may need to reduce or even stop the anti-rejection medication to help the body fight off the illness. This can save people's lives, but unfortunately it may mean that the transplanted organ(s) might be rejected. The transplant may not work as well after recovery from the illness, or may stop working altogether.

Can you have visitors after your transplant?

The Guy's and St Thomas' website will be updated with this information – please ask family and friends to check before coming to the hospital. It is important that you bring your mobile phone and charger (or any other communication devices) with you to the hospital so that you can stay in touch with your family and friends.

How will we review you and your transplant after you go home?

Coronavirus has changed the way we run our transplant services. Most of your follow-up clinics will take place over the telephone. However, you will need to have regular blood tests, and we have systems in place to allow you to do this safely. After your blood test, we will phone you to discuss the results, and any other issues that you may have. We can still offer face-to-face appointments where they are needed, but we are trying to avoid bringing people to the hospital unless it is absolutely necessary. We will explain in detail how these systems work when you are ready to go home.

What happens if there are problems with your transplant?

Some patients need to come back into hospital after their transplant to treat complications such as rejection, or for further surgery. If this happens, you will be tested for coronavirus again, and put on an appropriate ward depending on whether you have the infection or not.

In the unlikely event that you have a major problem after the transplant that needs intensive care, you may be nursed close to patients with coronavirus if there are no other beds available, and this would carry a small risk that you might catch coronavirus.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about having a kidney or pancreas transplant, please contact the transplant pool recipient co-ordinators, **t:** 020 7188 9391, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111 **w:** www.111.nhs.uk

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A list of sources is available on request