

Hepatitis C Positive Donor Hearts

Answers to common questions

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a virus. It can infect the liver and cause inflammation. If it is not treated, HCV can cause *cirrhosis* and liver failure, many years after a person is first infected with the virus.

HCV can spread when a person comes in contact with the blood of someone who has the virus.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Many people with hepatitis C do not have any symptoms. Others may have *fatigue* (feel very tired), loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain, or *jaundice* (yellow color in the eyes or skin).

How common is hepatitis C?

In 2016, about 2.7 to 3.9 million people in the U.S. had hepatitis C.

How is it treated?

Many new medicines are now being used to treat hepatitis C. Most people easily tolerate these drugs. They are taken by mouth every day for 8 to 12 weeks.

Most of the side effects from these drugs are mild. They include headache, fatigue, and nausea.

What is a hepatitis C viremic donor?

A *hepatitis C viremic donor* has tested positive for active hepatitis C infection. If you accept a heart from a donor with HCV, you will most likely develop hepatitis C after your transplant.



Talk with your doctor if you have questions about your medicines.

If you decide to accept a heart from a donor with HCV:

- You will have access to an organ that might not be available to other recipients. Some transplant centers do not use organs from donors with HCV.
- Most likely, you will have a shorter wait time than if you accepted organs only from donors who do not have HCV. This shorter wait gives you a better chance of survival after transplant surgery. It also helps you have a better quality of life when you have your transplanted organ.

If Your Donor Tests Positive for Hepatitis C

If you receive a heart from a donor with HCV, the heart transplant team will monitor your blood work closely after transplant. We will watch for any signs of liver problems or HCV infection.

After you are discharged from the hospital, you will meet with one of our liver doctors. If you need treatment for hepatitis C, the doctor will explain when treatment will begin, how long it will last, and what side effects you may have while on treatment.

What do I need to do after transplant?

Until you have completed treatment and we have confirmed that your hepatitis C infection is cured:

- Your caregivers must wear gloves any time they are exposed to your blood. This includes when giving insulin or checking your blood sugar.
- Do not share razors or toothbrushes with anyone.
- Use barrier protection during sex.

After treatment, once the hepatitis C infection is cured, you are no longer at risk for spreading the virus to others.

Will I be cured of hepatitis C?

Studies show that when medicines are taken as prescribed, they have cure rates of 95 to 100%. This means that they cure more than 95 out of 100 people who have hepatitis C.

What are the long-term side effects of accepting a heart from a donor with HCV?

We do not know very much about the long-term outcomes of using an organ from a donor with HCV. To help us learn more, we will ask for your permission to collect data on you. This will include the results of blood work, heart biopsies, echocardiograms, and heart catheterizations. It is your choice whether or not to allow us to collect this data.

Studies at other transplant centers show that hepatitis C can be cured within 4 to 6 months from the time of transplant. The outcomes of those transplants were similar to patients who received organs from donors without HCV. This is why we believe that your outcome will be similar to someone who received a comparable heart transplant from a donor who did not have HCV.

If I need treatment for hepatitis C, how will it be paid for?

Other transplant centers have had success in getting coverage by insurance. We will work with your insurance company to cover the drugs needed to treat your HCV infection.

If your insurance denies coverage, you can apply for funding from pharmaceutical companies and patient foundations. You might also need to pay for some of the costs of HCV treatment yourself.

What if I choose not to accept a heart from a donor with HCV?

If you sign the first consent, it does **not** mean you will receive a heart from a donor with HCV. It means that you will receive offers both from donors who have HCV and from those who do not have the virus. You can decline a heart from a donor with HCV at any time, even if you signed the first consent.

If you are offered a heart from a donor with HCV, you will need to sign a second consent. By signing this second consent, you are accepting the heart from the donor with HCV.

If you choose **not** to accept a heart from a donor with HCV, it will not affect your care in any way. But, if you **do** accept a heart from a donor with HCV, you may receive more heart offers and might be on the waiting list for a shorter time.

To Learn More

To learn more about hepatitis C, visit the Centers for Disease Control website: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm#cFAQ62.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Transplant Services:
206.598.3882