

# Preventing infections after a transplant



After your transplant, you'll need to pay much more attention to possible sources of infection around you. In this fact sheet, you'll find some simple things that can help you prevent infection.

## Why is my risk of infection higher?

Anti-rejection (immunosuppressive) drugs enable you to live with a new organ. But these drugs make your immune system weaker. That's why your body doesn't fight off infections as well.

There are 2 periods during which the risk of infection is higher:

- **the first 6 months after the transplant**
- you're receiving treatment for **signs of organ rejection**



### IMPORTANT

During these times, you'll need to protect yourself even more from infection.

**The risk of infection also depends to a large extent on:**

- The germs you're exposed to (such as when there are small children in your environment).
- Wounds and procedures, which provide entry points for germs (such as through scratches).

## What kinds of infections can I get after the transplant?

The same as everyone else, such as colds, flu, and gastroenteritis. But you might also get less common infections, which you'll discuss with your care team. So you'll have to watch out for microbes you didn't think of before.

## How can I prevent infections?

### HAND WASHING

This is the best method of prevention!



1-Wet your hands



2-Lather with soap



3-Clean your nails



4-Rinse



5-Dry your hands



6-Finish with a paper towel

**Wash your hands often:** after blowing your nose, going to the bathroom, or touching garbage or animals. Also wash your hands whenever you handle raw food.

#### MEDICATIONS AND MEDICAL FOLLOW-UP

- > Take the medications prescribed by your doctor to prevent infection.
- > Go to all your follow-up appointments and blood tests.

#### TAP WATER

- > You can drink it without worry if it's treated by the municipality. In case of contamination, respect any advisories that are issued.
- > If it comes from a well, tell your nutritionist, who will advise you.
- > If you have doubts about the quality of the water, it's better to drink bottled water.

#### SOCIAL LIFE

- > Avoid contact with people who are sick, such as those with a cough or fever.
- > If friends or relatives have an infectious disease, tell them not to visit you. If they need to see you, invite them to wear a surgical mask and wear one yourself.

**Caution:** This mask should be changed every 30 to 45 minutes, or as soon as it becomes wet.



- > Avoid crowds and crowded places, such as the subway during rush hour, elevators, and shopping malls. Especially during times when you're at high risk of infection. If you can't avoid them, wear a surgical mask.
- > Avoid places where tuberculosis may be present (prisons, homeless shelters, etc.).

**If you had a lung transplant,** the risk of respiratory infections (colds, flu, pneumonia, etc.) is greater. Be very careful. When you go to the hospital or pharmacy, wear a surgical mask.

#### LEISURE ACTIVITIES

- > **Once your incision has healed,** you can swim in a swimming pool (public or private), lake, river, or the sea without any problem if:
  - the water is suitable for swimming;
  - you have no other wounds on your skin.Always take care not to swallow water while swimming. When you come out of the water, dry yourself right away.
- > Avoid spas and saunas, as their water can contain many germs.
- > Don't walk barefoot outside the house.
- > You can do outdoor work and go into the woods. However, this will expose you to a lot of germs. Wear gloves when handling soil, peat, or manure. Wear shoes, a long-sleeved shirt, and pants.
- > Some activities are not recommended: for example, cleaning mould in a house or visiting caves.
- > Don't play contact sports such as boxing and rugby, as they can cause injury.
- > Avoid going to a construction site, as the dust can contain a large amount of spores from a fungus that can make you very sick (*Aspergillus*). The safe distance from a construction site is about 100 metres (the length of a football field). If you must go, wear a surgical mask or an N95 mask (for lung transplant cases).
- > If any renovation work needs to be done in your home, avoid doing it after the transplant and during any anti-rejection treatment. Talk to your healthcare team first. Together you will assess the risks and safety measures to be taken.

## TOBACCO AND DRUGS

- > Don't smoke, and avoid second-hand smoke. Besides being harmful to your health, it increases the risk of respiratory infections. To find out more about the help available, read the health sheet [Quitting smoking during my hospital stay](#).
- > Don't smoke marijuana or any other drug (crack, etc.), especially if you've had a lung transplant. Marijuana may contain spores (seeds) of a fungus (*Aspergillus*). Use marijuana only if a health professional has prescribed it for you.
- > Also, don't use drugs intravenously. Sharing needles with other users puts you at risk for serious infections, such as HIV and hepatitis. If you have an addiction, your healthcare team can help you.



## VACCINATIONS

Ask your health care team which vaccines are recommended for you. People with weakened immune systems need to follow special instructions. In general:

- > Flu: get vaccinated every fall. Your family members should do the same.
- > Tetanus: if you haven't received this vaccine or a booster dose in the last 10 years, you should get vaccinated.
- > If you're around young children who go to daycare, they should be vaccinated according to the schedule (see Useful Resources). **Caution:** Live attenuated (weakened) vaccines can cause a mild form of the disease that can be contagious.

## INSECT AND TICK BITES

- > In summer, protect yourself from mosquito bites. They can transmit West Nile virus, and the disease can be more severe in transplant patients.
  - Use a DEET-based mosquito repellent when outdoors.
  - Cover your skin with long sleeves, pants, socks, etc.
- > Also protect yourself from ticks, which can transmit Lyme disease.

## ANIMALS

- > Don't touch a stray, injured, or sick animal, even if it has only diarrhea.
- > Avoid visits to zoos.
- > If an animal has scratched or bitten you, see a doctor right away. Bring your vaccination record with you.
- > If you already had a pet before the transplant, you can keep it, but:
  - Be sure to keep it clean, healthy and vaccinated.
  - Don't touch its feces.
  - Have someone else wash the cage or litter box. Otherwise, wear gloves and a surgical mask and use a disinfectant. When finished, wash your hands.



Normally, it's recommended to wait a year before buying a pet. This is the time when your medication is being stabilized. When choosing your pet, keep in mind that some present a higher risk for infections, such as rodents (hamsters, mice, etc.), cats, reptiles, chickens, and ducks.

## DENTAL CARE

- > Practice good oral hygiene to prevent gum infections, cavities, and ulcers (mouth sores). Go at least once a year, or as often as recommended by your dentist, for an examination and cleaning. Tell your dentist you've had an organ transplant.

## TATTOOING AND PIERCING

- > It's best to avoid them. If you insist, make sure the equipment and application technique are sterile.

## SEX LIFE

- > Consult the health sheet [\*Becoming active again after a transplant.\*](#)



## EATING

- > Consult the health sheet [\*Preventing food poisoning when your immune system is weakened.\*](#)

## WORKING

- > With your doctor, you'll assess the risks associated with your work. You may need to take special measures.

## TRAVEL

- > See the fact sheet [\*Travelling after a transplant.\*](#)

## Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

Don't hesitate to ask questions of your transplant care team.



## USEFUL RESOURCES

Documents on hand washing from the Ministry of Health and Social Services of Quebec:

- With soap and water  
> [publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/en/](https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/en/)  
In the Search field, type: hand washing
- With a hydroalcoholic solution  
> [publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/en/](https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/en/)  
In the Search field, type: disinfect

Consult the vaccination schedule:

- > [quebec.ca/en](https://quebec.ca/en)  
Click on Health → Advice and prevention  
→ Vaccination

Check the quality score for water at a beach in your region:

- > [mdelcc.gouv.qc.ca/index\\_en.asp](https://mdelcc.gouv.qc.ca/index_en.asp)  
Click on Water → Recreational Waters  
→ Environnement-Plage (French)

Check the advisories on boiling water and avoiding tap water:

- > [mdelcc.gouv.qc.ca/index\\_en.asp](https://mdelcc.gouv.qc.ca/index_en.asp)  
Click on Water → Drinking Water  
→ Boil water and drinking water avoidance advisories (French)

To find out more about Lyme disease:

- > [quebec.ca/en](https://quebec.ca/en)  
Click on Health → Health issues → A to Z  
→ Lyme disease

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website  
[chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](https://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)

*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

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