

# BK or JC virus infection after a transplant



This fact sheet explains why it's important to monitor for BK and JC viruses after an organ transplant and what you can do to prevent them from making you sick.

## What are BK and JC viruses?

They are part of the polyomavirus family. You may never have heard of them.

Most adults (60% to 80%) have one of these viruses without knowing it. They are often caught in childhood. They usually cause no symptoms or pass for a cold. They stay dormant in the body, most often in the kidneys, brain, or spleen. This is called a latent infection.

## Am I at risk of infection from these viruses?

After a transplant, the BK virus or JC virus could cause you health problems. This is called reactivation. This often happens in kidney transplant recipients. In other types of transplants, it's less common.

You're at risk of developing a BK or JC virus infection if:

- either of these viruses was present (latent) in your body before the transplant
- the organ donor was a carrier

After a transplant, these viruses may become active because your immune system is weakened by anti-rejection drugs.



## Can these viruses cause complications?

Complications are rare, but can be very serious. These viruses can affect the function of your new kidney.

In rare cases, the JC virus (but not the BK) can also cause neurological symptoms, such as visual disturbances, confusion, memory loss, and movement disorders. In very rare cases, there may be central nervous system damage.

## What can I do to prevent these problems?

It's very important to have all your blood tests and attend all follow-up appointments with your health care team.



These appointments are scheduled at regular intervals to prevent the possible complications of an organ transplant, such as infection.

Blood tests are used to determine, without delay:

- whether you have a BK or JC virus infection, as these are detectable in the blood
- whether your kidneys are functioning properly

These tests are scheduled for all kidney transplant patients. For other types of transplants, they're done more rarely.

## Are there any symptoms to watch for

These viruses generally cause few or no symptoms. This is why blood tests are essential.

## How are BK or JC virus infections treated?

There is no specific treatment. However, to help your body fight infection, your specialist doctor can adjust your anti-rejection medications. The infection is then closely monitored to prevent organ rejection.

Your doctor may also suggest a change in medication.



**In the year following your transplant, you're at greater risk of getting this type of infection. It's very important to keep all your blood test appointments.**

## What should I do if I need to cancel or postpone my blood test appointments?

Call the CHUM Transplant Clinic, Monday to Friday, between 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.:

> 514 890-8255



## Who can I contact for questions?

Take advantage of your follow-up appointments to ask questions and discuss your concerns.

You can also call your follow-up nurse, Monday to Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.:

Tel.: .....

Evenings and weekends, you can reach the on-call transplant doctor by calling **514 890-8444**.



### USEFUL RESOURCES

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](http://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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