

JUNE 2023

UI HEALTH CARE ORGAN TRANSPLANT CENTER

Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is one of one of the most common infections after any transplantation. CMV infection can be asymptomatic (no symptoms) or can lead to a wide range of symptoms, from general discomfort to severe disease in multiple organs. CMV can also have “indirect” effects, including increased risk of other infections or the transplanted organ not functioning correctly. As your transplant team, our goal is to keep you and your transplanted organ healthy by giving you preventive antiviral medication if needed, and/or managing the CMV infection quickly when it is diagnosed. While many transplant patients have CMV infection at some point after transplantation, as usual, we can prevent complications from it as long as we work together!

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June is National Cytomegalovirus (CMV) Awareness Month

CMV is a common virus that can infect anyone of any age, and over half of adults in the U.S. have it in their body by age 40. CMV spreads easily through an infected person’s saliva, blood, tears, or other bodily fluids. It is related to the herpes virus which gives you cold sores. Many people are first infected with CMV during childhood. If you have a healthy immune system and become infected, it usually only causes mild symptoms, similar to a common cold or mononucleosis. The virus remains in your body for life, and a healthy immune system keeps it inactive.

CMV is one of the most common opportunistic infections that affect the outcome of solid organ transplantation and can cause severe illnesses at any time. The risk is highest in the first year after transplant due to a weakened immune system and high doses of anti-rejection medications. This makes it harder for your body to fight off CMV and other infections.

There are some risk factors for CMV, including the type of transplant received, age, other health problems, specific medications, whether you’ve been treated for transplant rejection, and several other factors. An active CMV infection can raise the chances of organ rejection. If you have high risk factors, you will likely be prescribed anti-viral medications to prevent CMV. It is very important to take them as prescribed daily.

Want more information? Here are some resources!

[UI Health Care Kidney: \(319\) 356-1136](#)[CDC](#)[UI Health Care Liver: \(319\) 356-1137](#)[Iowa Department of Health & Human Services](#)[WebMD](#)Additional information was gathered from Cedars-Sinai and UW School of Medicine & Public Health.

CMV Symptoms and Next Steps

There are many symptoms of CMV. Just because you have the symptoms does not mean you have CMV.

CMV is found by a blood test, which your transplant provider will conduct based on your symptoms. You should call your transplant nurse coordinator if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Low white blood cell count
- Fatigue or a general feeling of being unwell
- Muscle aches
- Swollen lymph nodes

Your transplant provider may reduce your anti-rejection medications and prescribe anti-viral medications to help fight the CMV. If you require IV medications, you may need to be hospitalized. You may need to be seen in the transplant clinic to determine the severity of your infection, see if it is causing any damage to your organs, and have blood work to check your CMV levels.

CMV and My Transplant

How will you know when CMV is gone?

You will need to have blood tests done to see if the virus is going away or getting stronger. Your blood will be tested for a period of time after stopping the anti-viral medications to be sure that the CMV has not returned. CMV stays in a person’s body for life, so you can have the infection more than once.

If I have CMV, will my transplant be ok?

CMV can affect your transplant and other systems in your body. Your doctor and transplant nurse coordinator will watch the virus closely. CMV can spread to other organ systems in your body. If left unchecked, it can be very serious. Most often, the anti-viral treatment can get rid of the virus before it causes a serious problem.

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