

**COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Resources for Transplant Patients**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**  
**Updated: March 13, 2020**

Along with the entire Vanderbilt University Medical Center community, those of us in the Vanderbilt Transplant Center are following the COVID-19 crisis closely and taking necessary steps to protect our patients and ourselves. Please be assured that we are here for you. Answers to the questions below will be updated regularly as we learn more about COVID-19. Additional information can be found at <https://www.vumc.org/coronavirus/information-vumc-employees-and-patients>

**What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is the name of the virus (a kind of coronavirus) that is currently infecting humans across the world. This disease first started in China and has since spread to more than 100 countries, including the United States. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus, meaning that it may cause flu-like symptoms and problems like fever, sore throat, dry cough, shortness of breath, and pneumonia.

**How is COVID-19 spread?**

The virus spreads via droplets – particles that infected people send into the environment when they sneeze, cough, drip or breathe. When these droplets enter someone else’s eyes, nose or mouth, that person may also become infected. It is important to understand that people may become infected with COVID-19 several days to weeks *before* they develop symptoms – in other words, even persons without symptoms may be contagious.

**Are transplant patients at higher risk for COVID-19?**

Given their immunosuppression, transplant patients are felt to be at higher risk for developing COVID infection and having more severe COVID infection, and also felt to be at higher risk for spreading infection to people around them.

**Are there treatments for COVID-19?**

There is not currently a cure for COVID-19. Treatment is supportive care, meaning treatment of symptoms and complications.

**Are there specific travel restrictions for transplant patients?**

Consistent with recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, we recommend that transplant patients and their immediate household contacts:

- Avoid all non-essential travel by air
- Cancel all travel by cruise

- Avoid all travel to locations where COVID-19 is known to be infecting the community – since this is changing every day, avoidance of all non-essential travel is advisable

### **What precautions should transplant patients take to avoid COVID-19?**

Our best advice is to use common sense and good judgment, wash hands *frequently and well*, and practice *social distancing*. Social distancing means avoiding:

- Any and all crowds
- Any place where five or more persons might congregate in a close space
- Anyone who is sick, especially with respiratory symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, sore throat)
- Public places (schools, theaters, public transportation, etc)

Consistent with CDC recommendations, we are not currently recommending that our transplant patients wear masks as it is not known if masks will be of benefit. Instead, better to stay at home as much as possible.

### **What should transplant patients do if they develop flu-like or respiratory symptoms?**

Patients who develop symptoms including sore throat, fever, shortness of breath, muscle aches or new cough should CALL THE TRANSPLANT CENTER where they will be directed by transplant center staff as to appropriate next steps. Those patients with concerning symptoms will be given guidance about how and where to get tested for COVID-19. Patients with mild symptoms should NOT come to clinic or the Emergency Room, given the risk of infecting others. If a transplant patient has a medical emergency (like severe shortness of breath), they should go to the ER or call 911 and let the operator or emergency room staff know immediately if they believe they have been exposed to COVID-19 so that necessary precautions can be taken.

### **What is the approach to transplant candidates and patients coming for routine clinic visits?**

The Transplant Center is actively reviewing all transplant clinic schedules to determine which patients should keep their clinic visits and which patient visits can be safely postponed. A member of the Transplant Center staff will reach out to you if we believe your visit should be cancelled or postponed. If you do not hear from us, please plan to be here for your appointment, or call the Transplant Center to discuss at least 24 hours or more in advance of your scheduled visit. Patients with symptoms should NOT come to clinic unless instructed by the transplant center staff to do so. Please call the center prior to your clinic visit if you have symptoms. For the time being, we are LIMITING the number of persons who come with you to clinic to ONE person who does not have symptoms.