

BK Virus

What is BK virus?

BK virus is a common virus that many people are exposed to in their normal life. Most times it does not cause symptoms for people with healthy immune systems. They can fight it off without getting sick. Once BK virus infects a person, the virus remains in your body for life, but a healthy immune system keeps the virus inactive. In kidney transplant patients though, the BK virus can become active and may cause damage to the kidney.

How did I get it?

Most people in the United States are carriers of BK virus. You were most likely exposed at some point in your life but did not know it.

Do I need to worry about spreading it to other people?

No, there is a good chance that the people around you have already been exposed.

How do you know I have it?

BK virus is detected by a blood test. We schedule blood tests to screen all kidney transplant patients for the first 2 years after transplant. We will arrange for more blood tests to screen for active BK virus infection if there is worry that you may be at risk based on your lab results or changes in your medicines. A kidney transplant biopsy may be needed to see if the BK virus infection is causing damage to your kidney transplant.

Can you treat it?

If you have active BK virus in your blood, we may decrease the doses of your anti-rejection medicines. This will help your own body fight the BK virus to clear it from your blood before it can cause problems with your kidney transplant function. We may give you extra medicine to treat the BK virus.

How will you know it's gone?

You will have your blood checked often to see if the virus is going away or getting stronger.

If I have BK, will my kidney be okay?

Although the BK virus can affect your kidney transplant, your doctor and coordinator will watch the virus closely. We most often catch BK in the blood before it causes damage to the new kidney. We will discuss the treatment with you and try to stop the virus from hurting the new kidney.