

Organ Transplant Information Sheet

Human organs fail due to illness, disease or injury. When that happens, a donated organ may be transplanted into the body of the person whose own organ has failed. Transplantable organs include heart, lung, liver, kidney, pancreas and intestine. In some cases two organs are transplanted at once, e.g., heart-lung, kidney-pancreas.

The wait for an organ transplant may be very long. The child receives an extensive medical evaluation and the child's name is placed on a national waiting list of candidates. Doctors must match donors to recipients to reduce the risk of transplant rejection. The organ transplant may involve a long period of hospitalization before and after the surgery itself.

Symptoms of Organ Rejection

- Pain at the site of the transplant
- Feeling unwell
- Crankiness (in children)
- Flu-like symptoms
- Fever
- Weight changes
- Swelling
- Change in heart rate
- Urinating less often

Educational Implications

The student may be absent from school during the pre-transplant medical evaluation. Pediatric patients with kidney and liver failure may demonstrate delays in cognitive and motor development. Organ transplants in general may also increase the risk for psychiatric disorder. After transplantation, there will likely be a long period of hospitalization, followed by clinic and lab appointments. Upon return to school, the child may be able to participate in a regular school program.

The student may need to take daily antirejection medicines for the rest of his or her life to prevent the immune system from rejecting the new organ. Because these antirejection medicines weaken the immune system, the child may need to stay away from large crowds for a while and stay away from people who have infections. Nonprescription medicines, such as cold remedies, may cause issues with antirejection medicines.

Side effects of immunosuppressive medications that have implications for education include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Anemia
- Trouble sleeping
- Mood swings
- Tremors

Educational Options

Those students whose organ transplant adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories. Under IDEA, a student with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.