

Preventive measures in organ and tissue donation in Switzerland due to the COVID-19 pandemic

In view of the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections in Switzerland and across Europe, we are once again refining and expanding the guidelines issued on 5 March 2020 in consultation with the President of the Swisstransplant Infection working group. This is especially in response to the fact that on 5 March 2020, a potential organ donor unexpectedly exhibited a positive nasal swab result for COVID-19 after PCR diagnostics.

Deceased donors

We recommend that PCR diagnostics be performed in the respiratory tract to exclude the possibility of COVID-19 infection (preferably using BAL or an oro- or nasopharyngeal swab) in all donors registered in the SOAS.

The test result must be available before the organs can be transplanted. If the PCR test is positive, organs can only be allocated to patients at vital risk (not to lung recipients) and only after the recipient has been duly informed. The transplantation should otherwise not take place. If the test cannot be performed in the hospital in which the organ or tissue is removed, the Swisstransplant National Transplant Coordination must be contacted on +41 58 123 80 40.

If a PCR test is already available, it cannot be more than 72 hours old when entry of the donor is first made in the SOAS. A repeat test is required if the time window exceeds 72 hours.

Living donors

To exclude the possibility of COVID-19 infection, we recommend PCR diagnostics in the respiratory tract using an oro- or nasopharyngeal swab with all living donors. The test result expires after 72 hours, and no new respiratory symptoms may appear after the test sample is taken. The test result must be available before donation from a living donor can be implemented. No donation from a living donor may be implemented if the test result is positive. It is becoming apparent that donations from living donors will be massively reduced in number in our neighbouring country to the south. It may even be necessary to stop them completely in the coming days.

In Switzerland, the transplantation centres are currently responsible for deciding whether to continue the living donor programme.

Tissue donation

To exclude the possibility of COVID-19 infection, we recommend PCR diagnostics in the respiratory tract of all tissue donors using an oro- or nasopharyngeal swab no later than 24 hours after death. The test result must be available before the tissue is released in the tissue bank. If the test result is positive, the tissue must be destroyed immediately and the Swisstransplant National Allocation Office must be informed.

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