

## BK Virus Infection: A Guide for Patients and Families

### What is the BK Virus?

The BK virus is a common infection that most people are exposed to in childhood or adolescence. The BK virus usually does not cause problems for people who are healthy. In fact, most people never have signs or symptoms of the BK virus. However, the BK virus can be serious in people with weakened immune systems (the part of the body that keeps you from getting sick).

### Why does it cause health problems for some people?

If you are infected with the BK virus, it can stay inactive in your body for years. If your immune system becomes weak, the BK virus can become active.

There are many factors that could cause your immune system to become weak:

- Serious illnesses, such as HIV/AIDS or diabetes.
- Certain medications, such as chemotherapy or as those given after an organ, bone marrow, or stem cell transplant.

### What symptoms should I look out for?

You may or may not have any symptoms of the BK virus. If you do notice any of these symptoms, call your doctor right away:

- Pain or discomfort when you pee (urinate).
- Blood in your urine (pee).
- Feeling like you need to pee more often than usual.
- Blood or blood clots in your urine.
- A reddish-brown color to your urine.
- Pain or cramping in the abdomen (stomach) area or lower back.
- Weight gain (from fluid retention).

### How is the BK virus diagnosed?

Your doctor will give you blood and/or urine tests to see if you are infected with the BK virus.

- **Testing negative for the BK virus:** If your blood and urine tests are negative for the BK virus but you still have symptoms, the doctor will determine if further testing is needed.

- **Testing positive for the BK virus:** If your blood and/or urine tests positive for the BK virus, you have the BK virus. However, you still may not have any symptoms. If you develop symptoms the doctor will determine which treatment will work best for you.

### **How is the BK virus treated?**

You may or may not need treatment for the BK virus. Treatment will depend on how severe your symptoms are.

If you do need treatment, the doctor will do one or more of the following:

- Give you pain medicine if you are in pain or uncomfortable.
- Change or decrease the dose of antirejection medicine if you are taking antirejection medicine.
- Give you anti-viral medicine to lower the amount of BK virus in your body.
- Give you IV (intravenous) fluids to help flush your bladder.

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