

Transplant can help people aged 65 and older with myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS)

Experts recommend that Medicare pay for transplant

New research shows people aged 65 and older can benefit from blood or marrow transplant (BMT) for myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS).

MDS is a serious blood disorder, and BMT is the only cure. Each year, about 15,000 Americans get MDS. Most are older than 65.

In the past, some doctors advised people over 65 **not** to get BMT, because it can have severe side effects. Also, Medicare, the health insurance program most common among Americans aged 65 and older, did not pay for BMT for MDS. Without Medicare coverage, many people with MDS could not afford it.

Recently, Medicare agreed to pay for BMT for patients with MDS only as part of a study. Researchers looked at health records of about 1,300 Americans who got BMT for MDS during 2010 to 2014. They compared people aged 55-64 versus 65 and older.

Three years after transplant, people aged 65 and older had recovered equally well as the younger group. They were also equally likely to be alive. Researchers found that people who had fewer medical problems before transplant tended to recover better after transplant. This was more important than their age.

Because insurance coverage affects access to BMT, researchers say Medicare should pay for BMT for people with MDS who are older than 65.

This study is still going on. Staff at transplant centers can help people aged 65 and older enroll in the study so that Medicare covers BMT. Results of a trial comparing BMT with non BMT treatment are expected in 2021.

Ask your doctor

- What is the best treatment for MDS for me?
- What are the risks and possible benefits of treatment?



Learn more about

- This [research publication](#)
- [MDS](#), from [BeTheMatch.org](#)
- [Clinical trials](#) for MDS, from [jcctp.org](#)
- More [study summaries](#) at [cibmtr.org](#)

About this research summary

This information is provided on behalf of the Consumer Advocacy Committee of the CIBMTR[®] (Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research[®]).

Source

Atallah E, Logan B, Chen M, et al. Comparison of Patient Age Groups in Transplantation for Myelodysplastic Syndrome: The Medicare Coverage With Evidence Development Study. *JAMA Oncol.* 2019. Epub 2019/12/13. doi: 10.1001/jamaoncol.2019.5140.

