

More, better, faster: A Standout Year for Heart Transplants at Stanford Health Care



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While the COVID-19 pandemic forced some transplant centers to slow or even shut down temporarily, Stanford Medicine's Heart Transplant Program continued apace. In 2020, Stanford Health Care performed 86 heart transplants, the most ever in a year.

"We transplanted more patients, we transplanted them faster, and we have been getting great outcomes," said Jeffrey Teuteberg, MD, section chief of heart failure, cardiac transplantation, and mechanical circulatory support at Stanford Health Care.

Among U.S. Leaders in Heart Transplant Volume and Outcomes

Stanford Health Care, which pioneered cardiac transplantation, was the fourth-largest transplant program in the country in 2020.

In recent years, our program has averaged about 65 transplants a year. In 2020, we were able to improve our volumes by partnering with cardiology groups in the Bay Area and beyond and increasing awareness of our shorter wait times and exceptional outcomes.

Based on the latest report from the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR), our patients' one-year heart transplant survival rate is 95%, compared with the national average of 91%.* We achieve this outstanding survival through our continued focus on quality improvement measures.

Teuteberg said, "We have improved how we select patients, manage them during surgery, and care for them after transplant."

Reducing Heart Transplant Wait Times by Accepting More Organs

At the same time, the Stanford Heart Transplant Program has reduced the time that transplant candidates must wait for a new heart. Shorter wait times reduce the number of deaths among wait-listed patients.

Stanford Health Care's reduced wait times in part reflect a new system initiated by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the nonprofit that manages the nation's organ transplant system. Under a protocol introduced in October 2018, UNOS places patients into one of six categories, instead of one of three categories, based on the severity of their illness. That helps medical centers identify the most acutely ill patients in immediate need of a transplant and match available organs to them faster.

Providing New Hearts, Sometimes in as Little as a Week

The median wait time for a heart transplant at Stanford Health Care is significantly shorter than other transplant centers in the Bay Area and nationally. Last year, the average wait time was about three months, with some of the sickest patients receiving transplants in as little as a week.

The SRTR report also shows that we are capitalizing on the available pool of organs, which are still in chronically short supply. Transplant centers generally evaluate organs based on several factors, such as the pumping ability of the donor heart, the donor's age, and the distance to travel to retrieve the organ. Our aggressive protocols for evaluating and preserving donor hearts make more hearts available to more patients in a shorter period of time. Stanford Health Care is 93% more likely to accept an organ than other centers around the country.

"I would say we are more aggressive than other centers," Teuteberg said. "I think there are lots of good organs out there, and some centers may not take them because they are farther away or organs may be from an older donor, but they are perfectly fine organs. We're expanding the pool by taking advantage of what's there."

Nationally Recognized for Innovation and Expertise

In addition to our positive outcomes, Stanford Health Care continues to lead the way in developing and using heart transplant innovations such as:

- Blood tests to noninvasively detect rejection: We are leaders in gene-expression profiling and donor-derived cell-free DNA for early detection of graft injury. These methods enable patients to avoid invasive heart biopsies while still closely monitoring their heart for rejection.
- Heart transplants from Hepatitis C-positive donors: These transplants are followed by treatment with highly effective antiviral therapies, providing our patients access to an even larger pool of potential donors.
- Ex vivo warm perfusion to support donor hearts: Stanford is among a select few transplant programs to use this technique for organ preservation. We will also be initiating a DCD (donation after circulatory death) protocol to further expand the donor pool.

We continue to be recognized as a top-ranked heart transplant hospital for our high volumes, innovations, and expertise. Stanford Health Care is ranked among the nation's top 10 Cardiology & Heart Surgery programs.**

Stanford Health Care remains committed to ensuring the safety of our patients. We welcome your referrals and encourage you to contact us at 650-723-5468 or email referral@stanfordhealthcare.org.

For more information, visit <https://stanfordhealthcare.org/medical-clinics/heart-transplant-program.html>

*SRTR Report Data, January 2021 [PDF]: https://www.srtr.org/document/pdf?fileName=\012021_release\pdfPSR\CASUTX1HR202011PNEW.pdf#page=29

**U.S. News & World Report Hospital Rankings and Ratings, 2020-21



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