U.S. Customs and Border Protection Provide Life-Saving Transport Clearance for Cellular Therapy Products

Transport of bone marrow and blood stem cells can continue between United States and Canada.

MINNEAPOLIS-July 7, 2020: The COVID-19 pandemic – with increasingly restrictive travel bans, border closings, and the declining availability of scheduled commercial passenger aviation service on international and domestic routes - has created unprecedented challenges for National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP)/ Be The Match in delivering life-saving cells to the patients who need them.

This new reality creates a web of increasingly complex challenges in facilitating the timely collection and delivery of bone marrow products to patients who are in the midst of treatment protocols or whose conditions have deteriorated to the point that a bone marrow transplant is the only course of treatment that will save their life.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection is providing a temporary transport clearance for bone marrow and blood stem cells coming from Canada to American patients.

"The clearance granted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection will allow our couriers to seamlessly transport life-saving bone marrow and blood stem cells between Canada and the United States," said Brian Lindberg, NMDP/Be The Match Chief Policy Officer. "This will make a meaningful difference for American patients awaiting transplants and hoping for a second chance at life."

NMDP/Be The Match operates the federally authorized program that matches unrelated volunteer donors with patients in the United States and abroad who have been diagnosed with leukemia and over 70 more otherwise fatal blood disorders and diseases.

In addition to matching donors and patients, one of our primary missions is coordinating the delivery of bone marrow domestically and internationally to patients in the United States and abroad. This life-or-death delivery historically was accomplished by trained couriers hand carrying donated marrow in the passenger compartment of commercial aircraft from donor collection centers to the hospitals of patients across the globe.

Patients who are scheduled to receive transplants in the coming days are already in the process of a scheduled course of chemotherapy and radiation treatments designed to eliminate their existing immune systems in preparation for the transplantation of cells to create a healthy, new immune system. If the transportation of donor cells (which have a short efficacious shelf-life) is interrupted, the consequences are fatal to these patients whose immune systems have been ablated.

Clint Lamm, CBP's Director of the Preclearance Field Office, supports the initiative, "In this era of global pandemic impacting international travel and commerce, CBP is pleased to be able to work with our partners to identify innovative ways to serve public interests."

Since the start of the coronavirus crisis, NMDP/Be The Match has continued to complete transport of cellular therapy with no delay to patient care.

About Be The Match®
For people with life-threatening blood cancers—like leukemia and lymphoma—or other diseases, a cure exists. Be The Match connects patients with their donor match for a life-saving marrow or umbilical cord blood transplant. People can contribute to the cure as a member of the Be The Match Registry®, financial contributor or volunteer. Be The Match provides patients and their families one-on-one support, education, and guidance before, during and after transplant.

Be The Match is operated by the National Marrow Donor Program® (NMDP), a nonprofit organization that matches patients with donors, educates health care professionals and conducts research through its research program, CIBMTR® (Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research®), so more lives can be saved. To learn more about the cure, visit BeTheMatch.org or call 1 (800) MARROW-2.

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