Lung Transplant Pool For Kids Just Got Bigger

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The high profile story of two children who need lung transplants has moved organ transplant board members to action, with ramifications for other youngsters in need of new lungs.

In a revision of existing policy, the executive committee of the board that runs the organ transplant system ruled Monday that children 11 or younger can be considered for transplant [1] from an adolescent or adult donor.

But the new policy will expire next July, unless the full board of the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network/United Network for Organ Sharing keeps it in place, the organization said in a statement.

The executive board voted Monday to let children's doctors appeal to a review board to classify some children 11 or younger as adolescents, potentially giving them access to more lungs than just those available for pediatric transplant.

In such cases, their priority on the adult list would be determined by their Lung Allocation Score -- essentially a measure of disease severity -- and children would retain their position on the pediatric list, the board decided.

"The number of patients potentially affected by this policy is very small and unlikely to have a significant impact on the larger pool of transplant candidates," the executive board said.

Before the ruling, children younger than 12 could only be considered for a transplant from a pediatric donor.

The issue got a national spotlight when the families of 10-year-old Sarah Murnaghan, and 11-year-old Javier Acosta, 11 -- both cystic fibrosis patients at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia -- sued to change the rule.

In response, Federal District Court Judge Michael Baylson ordered that the under-12 rule be suspended for both children for 10 days [2]. He was to hear further arguments on the issue this coming Friday.

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