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Dolton girl finally gets transplant

(<http://www.suntimes.com/lifestyles/health/1742028,CST-NWS-liver30.article>)

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The wait is finally over for young Brianna Jeffries.

The 6-year-old Dolton girl had been on the organ transplant waiting list for a new liver since November 2007.

She finally got her transplant July 25 at the University of Chicago's Comer Children's Hospital.

"Our life was on hold," said Brianna's mother, Veronica Jeffries. "We really couldn't plan anything because we didn't know when she would need to go to the hospital."

Now, Jeffries is looking forward to taking her family to Walt Disney World.

Having a healthy liver also means that Brianna will be able to grow to a normal height and weight for her age, according to her doctors, bringing her one step closer to her dream: becoming a model.

"She's doing great," her mom said.

Brianna was one of six people profiled last year in "The Wait: Life on the Transplant List," a Chicago Sun-Times special report.

She needed a transplant because of a cancerlike condition that triggered the destruction of the bile ducts in her liver. Without them, Brianna's liver couldn't absorb fat, leaving her chronically malnourished.

Before she could get a new liver, though, Brianna had to undergo months of chemotherapy to treat her condition, called Langerhans cell histiocytosis.

A month after the transplant, Brianna remains in the hospital because of a reaction she had to one of her medications. She could be released as early as this week, her doctors say.

But she'll need chemotherapy again soon, because she still has traces of histiocytosis in her legs.

The good news is, even if the condition returns, "It's very unlikely she will go back to where she started before the transplant," said Dr. Ruba Azzam, the hospital's medical director of the pediatric liver transplant program.

Jeffries said the constant trips to the hospital were hard on her because she couldn't work, make plans or spend as much time as she wanted to with Brianna's three older siblings.

Brianna, meanwhile, has taken everything in stride.

"She has an angel's spirit," Jeffries said. "It doesn't even seem like she's been through what she's been through."

Asked what she planned to do once she got home, Brianna said "play with my dolls."

Smiling, she added, "I miss my dog, Tiffany."



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