



COVID Vaccine FAQs for Transplant Patients

Is the vaccine safe for transplant patients? Yes. Our transplant team experts feel that the benefit of getting a COVID-19 vaccine far outweighs any potential risk. Because of a lowered immune system, transplant patients can have worse outcomes if they do get COVID-19 infection.

When should I get the vaccine? We now require patients to get the COVID-19 vaccine in order to be active on the transplant waiting list. If not possible before transplant due to medical reasons, you need to wait at least one month before starting or completing the vaccine series. You should receive the first COVID-19 vaccine that becomes available, regardless of the vaccine manufacturer. Talk with your Transplant Coordinator if you have questions about timing of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Should my caregiver, household members, family, etc. get the vaccine? Yes. It is very important for them to get the vaccine when it is available to protect you and to protect themselves. They should also follow the standard COVID-19 prevention guidelines.

If I have not had a transplant yet, will I be required to get the vaccine? Yes. OHSU Transplant has always required patients to complete all appropriate vaccine series prior to transplant, which now includes the COVID-19 Vaccine. This is for protection against infections after your transplant, when your immune system is weakened due to antirejection medication. Because of a lowered immune system, transplant patients have worse outcomes if they do get COVID-19 infection. Additionally, the vaccine is less effective if received after you are transplanted because of the medications take to lower your immune system. Getting vaccinated now is the best way to protect yourself from this infection while you are waiting for your transplant as well as protecting you after transplant.

Should I lower my mycophenolate or other immunosuppression medications before vaccination? No. It is important that you stay on your immunosuppression doses to decrease the risk of rejection. Rejection can require treatment with higher doses of antirejection medications. These higher doses lower your immune system more which would increase your risk of infection even more.

What about the information that the vaccine does not work for transplant patients? Recent studies do show that transplant patients have a lower antibody response to the vaccine when compared to the general population. This is expected, since we know transplant recipients have a lowered immune response to other vaccines. Lower antibody response may still prevent infection and it is important to see if the vaccine protects against severe COVID-19 disease. The goal is to prevent more cases of COVID-19 infection and to reduce the severity of

breakthrough cases with vaccination.

What is the difference between a booster dose and an additional dose?

- An **additional dose** is given when the initial immune response following a primary vaccine series is likely to be insufficient. This usually pertains to people with compromised immune systems.
- A **booster dose** is given when the initial sufficient immune response is likely to wane over time. This usually pertains to persons with healthy immune systems. There are no recommendations for booster doses at this time.

Can I get an additional dose? The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has now authorized and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has recommended an additional dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine for some people with weak immune systems. Patients with solid-organ transplants who are taking immunosuppressive therapy qualify for this additional dose.

We recommend you get an additional vaccine dose as potential benefits outweighs any risk. The vaccines are considered safe and may provide additional protection against COVID-19 in persons with compromised systems that may not have gotten a sufficient response to the vaccine.

- You should get the same dose type (Moderna or Pfizer) if possible but if not, it is ok to get the other dose type.
 - The Moderna vaccine is for people who are 18 years old or greater.
 - The Pfizer vaccine is for people who are 12 years old or greater.
- **You must have completed the series of shots more than 28 days ago to be eligible for the additional dose.** It does not matter if you had the series last year, you can still get the additional dose now.
- You do not need a doctor/provider note or prescription to receive this dose. You will just need to attest or confirm that you are immunocompromised.

Where can I get an additional vaccine dose?

- The additional vaccine dose has now been approved in Oregon.
- You may check with your local pharmacy or drugstore to see if they are providing this additional dose yet. The capacity of pharmacies to provide this is unclear and may vary. So far, we have confirmation that Walgreens, RiteAid, and CVS pharmacies are providing this additional COVID vaccine dose.
- OHSU Health pharmacies are beginning to offer additional doses. This does not require an appointment and you can just show up for the additional vaccine dose. We will let you know if something changes with getting these through OHSU pharmacy.

Can I get an additional vaccine dose if I received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine? For immunocompromised patients who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, there is not enough data to make a recommendation for an additional vaccine dose. Check with your transplant team or local doctor if you are interested in getting the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine. They will be able to share the most current recommendations.

Can my caregiver, household members, family, etc. get the additional vaccine dose? At this time, the CDC does not recommend an additional vaccine dose for caregivers, household members, or family.

What symptoms will I have with the additional vaccine dose? Your symptoms should be the same as symptoms with previous doses, but only at a mild to moderate level. The data we have so far from small studies has shown no critical side effects requiring hospitalization. The additional dose has not led to any serious adverse events or acute rejection episodes.

I have had COVID or I was treated for COVID-19. When can I get an additional vaccine dose? You should wait 90 days before seeking out an additional vaccine dose.

Can I get an additional vaccine dose if I am in the transplant process or on the waiting list? We expect that an additional vaccine dose will be coming for everyone. At this time, the CDC does not recommend the additional vaccine dose for people with diabetes, heart disease, chronic kidney disease, or liver disease. If you are fully vaccinated and not immunocompromised, it is currently not recommended that you get an additional vaccine dose. We will be closely watching the CDC for any changes to the list of who can receive the additional dose.

What if I have questions about getting the COVID-19 additional vaccine dose? Please call the Transplant Office 503-494-8500 during office hours, send your Transplant Provider a MyChart message, or contact your local doctor. **DO NOT PAGE RN AFTER HOURS OR ON WEEKENDS REGARDING VACCINE QUESTIONS.**

Do I still need to wear a mask? We recommend that all patients continue protective measures including masking and social distancing regardless of vaccination status. **The additional vaccine dose does not guarantee anyone immunity.** These protective behaviors should continue especially given the COVID-19 delta variant that can lead to breakthrough infections even if vaccinated.

- Continue to follow your federal and state laws and regulations.
- Wear a mask that fits well with no gaps
- Stay at least 6 feet from others you don't live with
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces until advised otherwise
- Get vaccinated
- Limit visits with people who are not vaccinated or whose vaccination status is unknown
- Wash your hands often

What if I have COVID symptoms?

- Notify your transplant center or managing doctor as soon as possible. You may qualify for medication (monoclonal antibody) to treat your COVID-19 infection.
 - This medication has to be given within 10 days of your first symptom.
- Stay home and isolate - separate yourself from others.

- You should also get a COVID-19 test.
- You can call the COVID Connected Care Center; open 7 days a week from 8 am to 8 pm at 833-647-8222. Call if you have any questions about COVID symptoms, quarantine or de-isolation guidelines.
- As always, call 911 if you have chest pain, problems breathing, or a high fever.

Should I get antibody testing? We do not recommend antibody testing as a way to determine if you have protection from COVID-19 infection. There are a different antibody tests out there with different target levels. Results of this testing may represent reaction to the vaccine and not protection from infection. There is no well-established protective target result. The results of antibody testing will not change recommendations to follow protective measures against COVID-19.

Where can I get a COVID-19 test, not the vaccine?

- Check with your local pharmacy or drugstore such as Walgreens or Fred Meyer.
- OHSU in Portland. You can call 833-647-8222 to make an appointment.
- The Oregon Health Authority site <https://govstatus.egov.com/or-oha-covid-19-testing> or call 211 for help to find a testing site.

How do I learn more?

- The CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html>
- The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/index.html>
- American Society of Transplantation Vaccine FAQ: <https://www.myast.org/sites/default/files/081321%20AST%20COVID%20Vaccine%20Info%20Patients%2008.13.21%20FINAL%20%281%29.pdf>
- Go to the OHSU site <https://www.ohsu.edu/health/coronavirus-resources>