

COVID-19 VACCINE AND PATIENTS WITH CANCER:

Frequently Asked Questions

WHEN WILL UAB MEDICINE OFFER THE COVID-19 VACCINE TO PATIENTS?

UAB Medicine is following the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) Vaccination Plan. High-risk patients, including those with cancer, will be offered the vaccine in Phase 1c of the plan. Those currently eligible for vaccine in Alabama are healthcare providers, nursing home residents, law enforcement officers, firefighters and persons age 75 and older. Beginning February 8, people 65 or older and additional groups of critical workers became eligible to get the vaccine. For more information, please visit <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19vaccine>.

We are working closely with the ADPH and will make sure that UAB Medicine patients are notified and given the chance to receive a vaccine once they are eligible, according to the ADPH Vaccination Plan.

We will communicate directly with patients through our website, social media, and the myUABMedicine Patient Portal once the vaccine becomes more widely available. Please speak to your care team about any questions or concerns you may have related to your cancer or treatment.

ARE THE VACCINES SAFE FOR PATIENTS WITH CANCER AND CANCER SURVIVORS?

The available COVID-19 vaccines were approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as safe and effective for use. The benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine are expected to far outweigh the known and potential risks for patients with cancer. There is limited information on the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines in patients with cancer, but there is nothing that suggests that the vaccine poses a greater risk to these patients, including those undergoing treatment.

UAB Medicine will continue to carefully review the latest science on the COVID-19 vaccines before making recommendations to our patients with cancer or offering the vaccine to these patients. Please know that we are giving careful consideration to our patients with cancer, as many have weakened immune systems or are receiving treatment that may weaken their immune system.

We share our vaccine recommendations directly with patients once recommendations have been finalized. Every cancer and treatment plan is different, so it is important to talk to your cancer care team about specific guidance related to your care once a vaccine is available to you.

SHOULD CAREGIVERS OF PEOPLE WITH CANCER GET THE VACCINE?

We encourage everyone who is eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine, especially those living with and/or caring for vulnerable people, such as those with cancer. Caregivers will be offered the vaccine based on their eligibility, as outlined by the ADPH Vaccination Plan, and whether or not they also meet other requirements in the plan. The ADPH Vaccination Plan does not have a defined phase for caregivers of people with cancer.

Please note that it is recommended that people with cancer and their caregivers continue to wear masks, practice social distancing, and wash their hands often, even after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

DOES THE VACCINE MAKE ME IMMUNE TO THE VIRUS OR JUST REDUCE THE SYMPTOMS?

COVID-19 vaccines are being carefully studied in research trials and are only authorized or approved by the FDA if they make it much less likely that you will get COVID-19. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were shown to prevent COVID-19 symptoms in people who received one, compared to those who did not receive a vaccine. Experts believe that getting a COVID-19 vaccine may help keep you from getting seriously ill from COVID-19 by boosting your immune system. Experts continue to study the effects of the vaccines on the severity of illness from COVID-19, as well as the vaccines' ability to keep people from spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.

WILL I STILL NEED TO WEAR A MASK IF I HAVE RECEIVED BOTH DOSES OF THE VACCINE?

Yes. Wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, and washing your hands often are still important after receiving the vaccine. There will be a limited supply of the vaccines at first, and because people will be vaccinated in phases, it will take time to vaccinate enough of the population to stop the spread of COVID-19. Also, it is not known how long immunity will last in people who have received both doses of the vaccine. So, it may be possible to become infected after vaccination, though it is likely that any symptoms would be less severe.

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccines and how they relate to your care at UAB Medicine, please visit uabmedicinevaccine.org.