

ORGAN TRANSPLANT PATIENTS & THE COVID-19 VACCINE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SHOULD I GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

The UAB transplant team and major transplant organizations around the world recommend that all organ transplant recipients get the vaccine as soon as it is available to them. We also advise that you talk with your transplant team if you have questions about your specific situation. Please let your coordinator know if you want to have that kind of discussion.

WILL THE VACCINE WORK?

There is no research yet about the vaccine in transplant patients, but safety and effectiveness data in non-transplant patients look very favorable with the current FDA-approved vaccines (Pfizer® and Moderna®). Studies on these vaccines suggest that they are highly effective in preventing illness from COVID-19. More than 90% of people who received the vaccine were protected from infection with the COVID-19 virus compared to those who did not get the vaccine. [Click here](#) to learn more about these vaccines. You should know that the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine in transplant recipients is expected to be lower than in the general population, therefore ***we strongly recommended that patients and caregivers continue to practice infection control measures such as masking, social distancing, and hand hygiene – even after vaccination.***

WHEN SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE?

To protect your health, we strongly recommend that you receive your vaccine as soon as it is available to you. When the vaccine is made available to you, you may fall into one of these two categories:

Before I get a transplant?

When possible, the vaccine should be administered in the pre-transplant setting, with the final dose at least 1-2 weeks prior to transplant. You do not need to wait to get the vaccine to be on the transplant list. It is not necessary to put your transplant status on hold while waiting for vaccination. If your transplant occurs between your two vaccine doses, your transplant physician will decide on the timing of the second dose.

I just received a transplant, when should I get the vaccine?

Based on expert opinions and experience with other vaccines, the earliest you should get a vaccine is one month after your transplant. It may be necessary to wait for 3-6 months after your transplant, depending on your individual situation and the type of organ you received. Your transplant team will review your case and advise you accordingly. Please also reach out to your transplant team to discuss this further. If your transplant occurs between your two vaccine doses, your transplant physician will decide on the timing of the second dose.

HOW AND WHERE SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE? IS IT OKAY TO GET IT LOCALLY, OR DO I NEED TO COME TO UAB?

You do not need to come to UAB to receive the vaccine. We recommend getting the COVID-19 vaccine from any health care provider that is offering it to you. Below is some additional information about where you may be able to get the vaccine, depending on where you live.

If you live in Alabama:

Eligibility criteria and prioritization is set by the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), which is organizing vaccine distribution at most county health departments. At the same time, local health officials can decide to vaccinate additional groups if they have enough vaccine, so some counties are ahead of others. If you live or work in a long-term care facility, the vaccine should come to you via a federal program partnering with CVS and Walgreens pharmacies. This program, which started in Alabama on Dec. 28, 2020, sends pharmacy employees to long-term care facilities to administer the vaccine. If you are a health care worker at a hospital or clinic that received a vaccine allotment, your employer likely will notify you when it is your turn.

If you live outside Jefferson County:

All eligible Alabama residents, except for those who live in Jefferson County, can schedule an appointment through the ADPH. The state established a hotline to schedule appointments at county health departments. That toll-free phone number is **1-855-566-5333**. Telephone calls are answered from 8 am to 5 pm seven days a week, though ADPH employees are struggling to keep up with massive call volume (they received more than 1 million calls the first day). State officials urge residents to only call the scheduling hotline if they are eligible or about to become eligible for a vaccine. For general questions about vaccination, residents can call **1-800-270-7268**.

If you live in Jefferson County:

The Jefferson County Department of Health (JCDH) has its own system to register residents for vaccination. If you live or work in Jefferson County, you may [click here](#) or call **205-858-2221** to learn more and sign up to receive a vaccine. The hotline is answered Monday through Friday from 8 am to 5 pm.

If you live outside Alabama:

Please contact your local health department about vaccine availability and eligibility in your area.

WHICH VACCINE SHOULD I GET?

Right now, we recommend the Pfizer® or the Moderna® vaccine only. As other vaccines become available, we may provide updated guidance.

IF I ALREADY HAD COVID-19, DO I STILL NEED THE VACCINE? IF SO, HOW LONG AFTER I HAD THE VIRUS?

If you already had COVID-19, we recommend waiting at least 90 days from diagnosis and symptom recovery before getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

I AM CONSIDERING STARTING A FAMILY IN THE FUTURE. CAN THE VACCINE CAUSE PROBLEMS WITH MY PREGNANCY OR BABY?

Several national organizations of physicians who care for pregnant women recommend the vaccine for women who are planning a pregnancy, pregnant, or are breastfeeding. These groups include the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. The currently available COVID-19 vaccines were not studied in pregnant women, but a few women who happened to be pregnant did safely receive the vaccine and are being monitored. Vaccination in pregnancy can have a beneficial effect and provide protection for mother and baby. The available evidence does not indicate that the vaccine can cause problems in pregnancy or with your baby. We advise you to talk with your care team if you have questions.

CAN THE VACCINE CAUSE REJECTION OF MY NEW ORGAN?

The experimental trials on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines did not include any organ transplant patients, and there are no data currently available about the risk of organ rejection related to receiving the vaccine. While very occasional cases of organ rejection have been reported with other non-COVID-19 vaccines, such as the flu vaccine, most transplant patients who received vaccines after their transplant have not had rejection issues. Also, they have the additional benefit of being protected from life-threatening illness. In patients undergoing active treatment for organ rejection, vaccination can be postponed for one month. We recommend that you avoid getting other vaccines within two weeks of getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

I AM CONSIDERING DONATING A KIDNEY. SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE BEFORE I DONATE? IS IT REQUIRED FOR ME TO DO SO?

We strongly recommend that you receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is available to you, to protect your health and the health of your loved ones. There is no current requirement to be vaccinated prior to donating a kidney, and getting the COVID-19 vaccine should not interfere with your evaluation or the donation process.

SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE IF I AM A CAREGIVER?

Household members and immediate caregivers for the transplant recipient should be vaccinated when possible. Right now, such people may be prioritized based on eligibility and scheduling rules set by their local public health department. However, until the vaccine is received, we strongly recommended that patients and caregivers continue to practice infection control measures such as masking, social distancing, and proper hand hygiene.

HOW CAN I STAY UPDATED ON THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Information is changing quickly. Please check for updates at uabmedicine.org/covidvaccine.

SOURCES: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Alabama Department of Public Health, and the American Society of Transplantation