

**COVID-19 Vaccination for Transplant Recipients**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**

This FAQ will be updated as more information becomes available. If you have further questions, do not hesitate to ask your doctor.

<b>Does COVID-19 affect transplant patients?</b>
Several organ transplant recipients have developed COVID-19. Some have had only mild symptoms while others have had a much more severe illness requiring admission to intensive care unit. There have been deaths in transplant recipients as a result of COVID-19. We do not know if COVID-19 is more severe in transplant recipients because they are immunosuppressed. COVID-19 disease may be worse in some transplant patients because of the other medical conditions that they may also have (for example diabetes).
<b>How effective is the vaccine?</b>
In a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, the Pfizer/Biontech mRNA vaccine was 95% effective at preventing COVID-19. Participants were followed on average of 2 months after vaccination. The Moderna vaccine was found to be similarly effective at 94%.
<b>Who should get vaccinated?</b>
As the COVID-19 virus infection is acquired in the community, the vaccine is indicated for everyone $\geq 16$ years of age. The vaccine is currently not approved for children under the age of 16.
<b>How effective is the vaccine in transplant recipients?</b>
There is not a lot of data looking at how effective or safe the vaccine is in transplant recipients. We believe that the vaccine is probably safe since it contains no live virus. The vaccine may be less effective in transplant recipients because they are immunosuppressed.
<b>Should transplant recipients get vaccinated?</b>
Like all vaccines, patients need to consider risks and benefits. Patients can always discuss vaccines with their individual transplant teams. Unfortunately, COVID-19 vaccines have not yet been tested in transplant patients. This does not mean they are unsafe or not effective. In fact, Canadian experts including the Canadian Society of Transplantation and all Ontario transplant program leaders believe that the COVID-19 vaccines being offered will have good benefit - and they will be as safe in transplant patients as they are in the general public. For these reasons and since the risk of serious disease is much higher in transplant patients, it is recommended that transplant patients receive the vaccine.  Vaccines are regulated by the federal government and the Ontario Ministry of Health, and 'when and how' COVID-19 vaccines will be made available to transplant patients is under discussion now. More information will come from ongoing studies. In the meantime, it is important for you to continue to wear masks, wash your hands and physically distance yourself from others, particularly indoors. It is also very important that all family members, especially those in the same house, receive COVID-19 vaccine to prevent any infection spread from them. Finally, everyone including transplant patients and their families, should continue to get the flu vaccine.
<b>When can I get a vaccine?</b>
There are several different COVID-19 vaccinations in development. The Pfizer/Biontech mRNA vaccine and the Moderna mRNA vaccine, have been approved by Health Canada. Other vaccines (University of Oxford/AstraZeneca adenovirus vector vaccine) are being reviewed.  The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is expected to be available soon. Priority for vaccination is currently being given to long-term care residents and workers, some frontline staff and indigenous populations. We will provide updates as to when the vaccine will be available to transplant recipients when that information is known.
<b>How many doses should I get?</b>
Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is given 21 days apart. The Moderna vaccine is given 28 days apart. You should not interchange the two vaccines – take the same vaccine for both doses.

<p><b>Where can I get a vaccine?</b></p> <p>The government will make vaccines available and eventually, you should be able to get it at your family doctor’s offices. It will be available at LHSC and SJHC.</p>
<p><b>Which vaccine should I get?</b></p> <p>While Health Canada has approved two vaccines, it is not likely that a vaccine will be 'approved' specifically for transplant recipients as there is no data. Government approval to give the vaccine to transplant patients will likely be required but we will act immediately on whatever approval and process that becomes available.</p>
<p><b>Does the vaccine have side effects?</b></p> <p>Side effects in general have been reported in 26% of study participants who received the vaccine compared to 12% of those who received the placebo. Reported side effects include fever, muscle aches, and fatigue.</p>
<p><b>Is there anyone who should NOT get the vaccine?</b></p> <p>People with a history of allergic reactions to vaccines or other medicines should talk to their transplant physician about getting the vaccine. The CDC states that this is a precaution, not a contraindication to getting the vaccine.</p>
<p><b>Do I need to get vaccinated if I have already been infected with COVID?</b></p> <p>Yes. The antibodies that are produced in response to COVID infections tend to decrease in levels within 3 months of the end of the infection. The natural immunity that occurs in response to an infection is not long lasting. It does not offer long term protection. There have been reported cases of re-infection in patients who have recently recovered from COVID-19.</p>
<p><b>Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?</b></p> <p>No. The vaccine does not contain live virus.</p>
<p><b>Do I need to continue to take extra precautions once I am vaccinated?</b></p> <p>Yes. There is not enough information on the protective immunity from the COVID vaccine in transplant recipients. We therefore, recommend that you maintain precautions including frequent hand washing, wearing a mask and physical distancing until more data are available.</p>
<p><b>Can I be vaccinated against other infections?</b></p> <p>Until more data are available, other vaccines should not be administered 2 weeks before or after the COVID-19 vaccine.</p>
<p><b>Can I get the vaccine if I currently have COVID-19?</b></p> <p>No. The vaccine should only be administered after recovery. You will need to be cleared for the vaccine after you recover from COVID-19 by your transplant physician.</p>
<p><b>Is the vaccine safe if I am pregnant?</b></p> <p>The COVID-19 clinical trials excluded women who were pregnant at the time of enrollment. Some women were found to be pregnant within the two months follow-up period. Neither of the COVID-19 vaccines have been recommended for pregnant people until more research is completed.</p>

References:

- Polack et al. Safety and Efficacy of the BNT162b2 mRNA Covid-19 Vaccine. NEJM Dec 10,2020. DOI:10.1056/NEJMoa2034577.
- The American Society of Transplantation. COVID-19 FAQ Sheet (released 2020/12/8). [https://www.myast.org/sites/default/files/2020%2012%2008%20COVID19%20VACCINE%20FAQS\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.myast.org/sites/default/files/2020%2012%2008%20COVID19%20VACCINE%20FAQS_FINAL.pdf). Accessed 2020/12/20.
- The Canadian Society of Transplantation. National Transplant Consensus Guidance on COVID-19 Vaccine (released 2020/12/18). [https://www.cst-transplant.ca/Library/Reference\\_Documents/National\\_Transplant\\_Guidance\\_on\\_COVID\\_vaccine\\_-\\_Dec\\_18\\_2020\\_Final\\_1\\_.pdf](https://www.cst-transplant.ca/Library/Reference_Documents/National_Transplant_Guidance_on_COVID_vaccine_-_Dec_18_2020_Final_1_.pdf)
- Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines Currently Authorized in the United States. [https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fvaccines%2F-covid-19%2Finfo-by-product%2Fpfizer%2Fclinical-considerations.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fvaccines%2F-covid-19%2Finfo-by-product%2Fpfizer%2Fclinical-considerations.html). Accessed 2020/12/20.
- Health Canada – COVID-19 Vaccines. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines.html>