Indiana Health Alert Network Notification

Update: COVID-19 Vaccines

Aug. 17, 2021

Third dose for immunocompromised people

On Friday, Aug, 13, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH, signed the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' (ACIPs') recommendation for an additional dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine in moderately to severely immunocompromised people. Dr. Walensky's statement can be found here. "At a time when the Delta variant is surging, an additional vaccine dose for some people with weakened immune systems could help prevent serious and possibly life-threatening COVID-19 cases within this population," Walensky said.

More information from the CDC, including FAQs, can be found below. Patients do not need a note from their healthcare providers prior to receiving the additional dose. It is appropriate for them to verbally attest to meeting the criteria. It is also important to educate patients that this is an additional dose only recommended for moderately to severely immunocompromised people and not a booster dose. A booster dose has not been approved by ACIP or the CDC.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Moderately to Severely Immunocompromised People

Updated Aug. 13, 2021

NOTICE: CDC now recommends that people whose immune systems are compromised moderately to severely should receive an additional dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine after the initial 2 doses. Widespread vaccination is a critical tool to help stop the pandemic. Read CDC's statement.

What You Need to Know

- People who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 because they are more at risk of serious, prolonged illness.
- People who have compromised immune systems may benefit from an additional dose to make sure they have enough protection against COVID-19.
- CDC recommends people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised should receive an additional dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine after the initial 2 doses.
- CDC recommends that people with moderately to severely compromised immune systems receive an additional dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine at least 28 days after a second dose of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.
- CDC does not recommend additional doses or booster shots for any other population at this time.

Data on Decreased Immune Response Among Immunocompromised People

People who are moderately to severely immunocompromised make up about 3% of the adult population and are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 because they are more at risk of serious, prolonged illness.

Studies indicate some immunocompromised people don't always build the same level of immunity after vaccination the way non-immunocompromised people do and may benefit from an additional dose to ensure adequate protection against COVID-19. In small studies, fully vaccinated immunocompromised people have accounted for a large proportion of hospitalized "breakthrough cases," and that suggests immunocompromised people are more likely to transmit the virus to household contacts.

Who Needs an Additional COVID-19 Vaccine?

Currently, CDC is recommending that moderately to severely immunocompromised people receive an additional dose. This includes people who have:

- Been receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood
- Received an organ transplant and are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Received a stem cell transplant within the last 2 years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
- Advanced or untreated HIV infection
- Active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids or other drugs that may suppress your immune response

People should talk to their healthcare provider about their medical condition, and whether getting an additional dose is appropriate for them.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long after getting my initial COVID-19 vaccines can I get an additional dose?

- CDC recommends the additional dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine be administered at least four weeks after a second dose of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

Can you mix and match the vaccines?

- For people who received either Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine series, a third dose of the same mRNA vaccine should be used. A person should not receive more than three mRNA vaccine doses. If the mRNA vaccine product given for the first two doses is not available or is unknown, either mRNA COVID-19 vaccine product may be administered.
- We do not expect vaccine providers to look up a patient's prior doses prior to administration of the additional mRNA vaccine.

What should immunocompromised people who received the J&J/Janssen vaccine do?

- The FDA's recent EUA amendment only applies to mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, as does CDC's recommendation.
- Emerging data have demonstrated that immunocompromised people who have low or no protection following two doses of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines may have an improved response after an additional dose of the same vaccine. There is not enough data at this time to determine whether immunocompromised people who received the Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 vaccine also have an improved antibody response following an additional dose of the same vaccine.

What are the benefits of people receiving an additional vaccine dose?

- CDC recommends the additional dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine be administered at least four weeks (28 days) after a second dose of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

What are the risks of vaccinating individuals with an additional dose?

- There is limited information about the risks of receiving an additional dose of vaccine, and the safety, efficacy, and benefit of additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine in immunocompromised people continues to be evaluated. So far, reactions reported after the third mRNA dose were similar to that of the two-dose series: fatigue and pain at injection site were the most commonly reported side effects, and overall, most symptoms were mild to moderate.
- However, as with the two-dose series, serious side effects are rare, but may occur.

Vaccines while pregnant or breastfeeding

On Aug. 11, the CDC updated it's COVID-19 vaccination guidance for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding. COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for all people aged 12 years and older, including people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, trying to get pregnant now, or might become pregnant in the future. A patient flyer is attached.

According to U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, MD:

- CDC recommends COVID-19 vaccination for all people who are pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to get pregnant now or in the future.
- Data show that pregnant and recently pregnant people are more likely to get severely ill if infected with COVID-19, and the highly contagious Delta variant makes it even more important for eligible people to get vaccinated.
- There is no evidence to show that getting a vaccine increases the risk of miscarriage. The CDC's recommendation is based on further evidence about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines and a new analysis of current data from the CDC's v-safe pregnancy registry.
- There is no evidence that fertility problems are a side effect of any vaccine, including COVID-19 vaccines.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology has created a guide for clinicians on having that conversation with patients.

Other helpful information:

- Professional associations (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, and others) and the CDC all recommend pregnant people receive a vaccination or vaccine series No doctor approval is needed to get vaccinated.

- There is no scientific evidence supporting claims of the COVID-19 vaccines causing infertility. People considering future pregnancy are recommended to get fully vaccinated.

- Data on the safety of the vaccine in pregnant individuals are growing and constantly being monitored.
- The benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks of vaccine side effects.
- The benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks of a COVID-19 infection. Pregnant people with COVID-19 infection are at increased risk of preterm birth, and potentially increased risk for other adverse outcomes compared to pregnancies without COVID-19.
- Pregnant individuals are at increased risk of COVID-19, and are likely to have more severe cases of COVID-19.
- Pregnant individuals are excluded from Phase 3 clinical trials, so high quality evidence is lacking. Studies are retrospectively observing pregnant individuals who elected to get vaccinated or who were infected with COVID-19.

Anyone who is pregnant and has received a COVID-19 vaccine, is encouraged to enroll in v-safe. V-safe is CDC's smartphone-based tool that uses text messaging and web surveys to provide personalized health check-ins after vaccination. A v-safe pregnancy registry has been established to gather information on the health of pregnant people who have received a COVID-19 vaccine.