

COVID-19 Vaccine:

Information for Individuals who have an Autoimmune Condition and/or who are Immunocompromised

Public Health Factsheet

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Manitoba 

Immunization is one of the most important accomplishments in public health. Over the past 50 years, immunization has led to the elimination, containment and control of diseases that were once very common in Canada¹. Vaccines help our immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

This factsheet provides additional COVID-19 vaccine information for individuals who are immunosuppressed due to disease (e.g., organ transplant, leukemia, lymphoma) or treatment (e.g., chemotherapy, high-dose steroids) and/or who have an autoimmune condition (e.g., Rheumatoid Arthritis, Multiple Sclerosis (MS)). Please also review one of the relevant factsheets with general immunization information, available at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/resources.html.

If a person has an immune system that is weakened by disease or medical treatment, this is referred to as being *immunocompromised* or *immunosuppressed*. Generally, people who have weakened immune systems are more prone to getting infections and are at greater risk for experiencing severe outcomes from infections.

Should people who have an autoimmune condition get the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine?

Individuals who have an autoimmune condition may be at increased risk of experiencing severe illness from COVID-19. Manitoba public health officials and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)² therefore recommend a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine for people who have an autoimmune condition, following a review of the risks and benefits applicable to everyone, while also taking into consideration the (un)known risks and benefits for people who have an autoimmune condition:

- **Vaccine safety:** There is no indication that the mRNA vaccines will worsen an autoimmune condition. Common and rare side effects reported after vaccination among people who have an autoimmune condition is similar to what has been reported in the general population. Fever is a common side effect following immunization, which may make an autoimmune condition *temporarily* worse.
- **Vaccine effectiveness:** A person's response to the vaccine depends on their underlying autoimmune condition, their progression of disease and use of medications.

Should people who are immunocompromised due to disease or treatment get the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine?

In general, people who are immunocompromised are at increased risk of experiencing severe illness from COVID-19, and the evidence suggests they require treatment in hospital or intensive care more often than the general population. Manitoba public health officials and NACI therefore recommend a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine series for people who are immunocompromised following a review of the risks and benefits applicable to everyone, while also taking into consideration the (un)known risks and benefits for people who are immunocompromised:

- **Vaccine safety:** There is no indication that the mRNA vaccines will worsen an underlying condition. Common and rare side effects reported after vaccination among immunocompromised people is similar to what has been reported in the general population.

¹The Public Health Agency of Canada

² Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) is an independent committee of recognized experts that provides informed advice on the use of vaccines in Canada. After Health Canada approves a vaccine, NACI critically evaluates all available evidence to make, and update, recommendations about its optimal use.

- **Vaccine effectiveness:** A person's response to the vaccine depends on their underlying immunocompromising condition, their progression of disease and use of medications. Generally, people who are immunocompromised do not develop as strong of an immune response after vaccination compared to the general population.

How many doses of COVID-19 mRNA vaccine do I need?

Individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are recommended to receive an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine to complete their primary series. This additional dose is recommended four to eight weeks after the last dose of the primary series. Your health care provider may recommend a different immunization schedule for you based on a review of your medical history and individual circumstances.

Individuals six months to four years of age who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are eligible to receive: three doses of the Moderna/Spikevax™ vaccine or four doses of the Pfizer/Comirnaty™ vaccine. The Moderna vaccine is preferred due to quicker protection from a three dose series. This age group is not yet eligible for a booster dose.

Individuals five years of age and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are recommended to receive a primary series of COVID-19 vaccine that consists of three doses. The interval between the first and the second dose is eight weeks.

The COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (Pfizer/Comirnaty™ and Moderna/Spikevax™) are the preferentially recommended COVID-19 vaccines. Individuals aged 5 to 29 are recommended to receive Pfizer/Comirnaty™ due to a lower risk of myocarditis/pericarditis with Pfizer/Comirnaty™ compared to Moderna/Spikevax™ in this age group.

Individuals five years of age and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are recommended to receive all eligible booster doses.

Novavax/Nuvaxovid™ is a different type of COVID-19 vaccine available in Manitoba that may be offered to adults 18 years and older who are unable or unwilling to receive a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine.

If you have an autoimmune condition or are immunocompromised but do not meet the definition of moderately to severely immunocompromised, you should follow the recommendations for the general population. Refer to the appropriate factsheet available at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/resources.html for information for the general population on COVID-19 vaccines including booster doses.

Information on booster dose eligibility and recommended timing of each booster dose is available at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/eligibility-criteria.html. A factsheet on booster doses is available at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/resources.html and should be reviewed as part of the informed consent process for first and second booster doses.

Where possible, complete the vaccine series at least two weeks before starting a medical treatment that may weaken your immune system.

Who is considered moderately to severely immunocompromised?

For the purposes of COVID-19 vaccine recommendations, the following individuals are considered to be moderately to severely immunocompromised:

- are receiving active chemotherapy (or immunotherapy) for cancer
 - have received a solid organ transplant and are currently receiving chemotherapy or other immunosuppressive therapy
 - were born with moderate or severe dysfunction of their immune system
 - are living with untreated or advanced HIV-AIDS
 - are taking certain medications that severely affect the immune system
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The following people should talk to their doctor to see whether they are considered to be immunocompromised:

- receiving hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis
- on the list to receive a solid organ transplant
- have a ventricular assist device

Where can I find more information?

For more information about COVID-19 or the COVID-19 vaccines, talk to your immunizer or health care provider. You can also call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at **204-788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll free in Manitoba).

Or visit:

Province of Manitoba: manitoba.ca/covid19/index.html

Government of Canada: canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html

Canadian Immunization Guide: canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/canadian-immunization-guide-part-4-active-vaccines/page-26-covid-19-vaccine.html
