

COVID-19 Vaccinations – Information for Patients with Autoimmune conditions and/or Immunosuppression

It is just over one year since the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Canada, and vaccines are now being delivered to Canada and the provinces. Some people may be worried about getting the vaccine if they have a weakened immune system or if they have an autoimmune disease. ***However, medical experts and public health officials, recommend that people who have autoimmune and/or immunosuppressive conditions should consider receiving the vaccine.***

How do I know if I have an autoimmune disease or if I am immunosuppressed?

Autoimmune Conditions are diseases in which your immune system attacks your own body by mistake. Common conditions include Type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, system lupus erythematosus, and vasculitis.

Immunosuppression is a condition in which your body's immune system has reduced ability to fight an infection. There are some diseases that can cause immunosuppression, like HIV. Immunosuppression can also be due to the drug treatments for a disease, such as persons undergoing cancer treatments, treatment for autoimmune diseases, or who have received organ transplants.

If you are not sure about your diagnosis, please talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner.

Is the vaccine safe?

- The vaccines being used in Canada were found to be safe and effective when tested in large numbers of people.
- People who were immunocompromised were not included in the vaccine studies, so we do not yet know if the vaccines will have the same benefits or side effects as the people in the research studies.
- The vaccines were shown to prevent sickness from COVID-19 70-95% of the time. The vaccines also reduced the severity of COVID-19 disease.
- The vaccines do not contain live virus, so you cannot get COVID-19 disease from the vaccination. Generally, vaccines that do not contain live viruses are recommended in patients with immune system conditions.
- We will learn more about whether the vaccines work as well in people with autoimmune diseases and immunosuppression as results from other studies become available, but we do not have a time frame for this.

Should I get the vaccine when it is offered to me?

- The benefits of the vaccine will outweigh the possible risks for people with autoimmune or immunosuppressive conditions the vast majority of the time. Persons with autoimmune diseases or are immunosuppressed may be at higher risk of illness and complications if infected with COVID-19 so protection from this illness is important.
- It is not clear whether the vaccine will work as well in persons with immune system conditions, but it is expected that there would be some protection.
- Talk to your health professional about the vaccine if you have any concerns. They can help you understand and weigh the benefits and risks of vaccination specific to you and help you make an informed choice. There is no requirement to have note from your health care provider.

When I get vaccinated, do I still have to wear my mask and follow public health measures?

- Continue to follow the important measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 after you are vaccinated; you need to continue to wear a mask, regularly wash your hands, practice social distancing, and follow the public health recommendations. As more evidence becomes available and more people become vaccinated, these measures may change.