

COVID-19 Vaccine:

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

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.

After vaccination, continue to focus on the fundamentals. Go to [manitoba.ca/covid19/fundamentals/focus-on-the-fundamentals.html](https://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/fundamentals/focus-on-the-fundamentals.html) for more information.

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 are immunocompromised due to disease or treatment get the COVID-19 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 the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)² 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.
- **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.

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 NACI 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:

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 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.

Who is considered 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

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

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

Individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are recommended to follow a 3-dose primary COVID-19 vaccine series.

Immunocompromised individuals 12 years and older are also recommended to receive a booster dose. This would be their fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Effective April 2022, individuals at highest risk of experiencing severe illness from COVID-19 (e.g., older adults), can receive a second booster dose. This would be the fifth dose of COVID-19 vaccine for people who are immunocompromised. Information on booster dose eligibility is available at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/vaccine/eligibility-criteria.html>. A factsheet on booster doses is available at <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/resources.html> and should be reviewed as part of the informed consent process for first and second booster doses.

If you have an autoimmune condition but are NOT immunosuppressed, 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.

Which COVID-19 vaccine should I get and when?

The recommended immunization schedule for individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised is:

	COVID-19 mRNA vaccine	Time between dose 1 and dose 2	Time between dose 2 and dose 3	Time between dose 3 and booster dose
Children aged 5 to 11 years	Pfizer/Comirnaty™ (10 mcg)	8 weeks	At least 28 days	Not authorized or recommended at this time
Children aged 6 to 11 years	Moderna/Spikevax™ (50 mcg)	8 weeks	At least 28 days	Not authorized or recommended at this time
Youth and young adults aged 12 to 29 years	Pfizer/Comirnaty™ (30 mcg)	8 weeks	At least 28 days	6 months
Adults aged 30 and older	Pfizer/Comirnaty™ (30 mcg) OR Moderna/Spikevax™ (100 mcg)*	8 weeks	At least 28 days	6 months

* Emerging evidence suggests Moderna/Spikevax™ (100 mcg) may produce a better immune response among people who are immunocompromised.

Your health care provider may recommend a different immunization schedule for you based on a review of your medical history and individual circumstances.

The COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (Pfizer/Comirnaty™ and Moderna/Spikevax™) are the preferentially recommended COVID-19 vaccines. (Individuals aged 12 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).

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.

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

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