Rheumatology Patients on Immunosuppressive Medications Qualify for Third COVID-19 Vaccine Dose

August 13, 2021

ATLANTA – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices today recommended that rheumatology patients being actively treated with high-dose corticosteroids, alkylating agents, antimetabolites, tumor-necrosis factor (TNF) blockers, and other biologic agents that are immunosuppressive or immunomodulatory receive a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna mRNA COVID-19 vaccines.

The approval came one day after the FDA announced it would be revising the current emergency use authorizations (EUA) for the two mRNA vaccines to permit a third dosage in certain immunocompromised patients. The recommendation applies for ages 12 and older for individuals receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and 18 and older for patients receiving the Moderna vaccine. The new EUA is specifically for the two mRNA vaccines and does not extend to recipients of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine currently.

The additional dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine should be administered at least 28 days after completion of the primary mRNA COVID-19 vaccine series, and patients and providers should stick to the same brand for the third dose, if possible. No determination was made on the safety of receiving one of the mRNA vaccines if a patient initially received the Johnson & Johnson shot.

All immunocompromised patients, including those who receive an additional mRNA dose should continue to follow prevention measures, including:

- Wearing a mask
- Staying 6 feet apart from those they don't live with
- Avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces until advised otherwise by their healthcare provider
- Close contacts of immunocompromised people should be strongly encouraged to be vaccinated against COVID-19

These preventative measures remain critical due to real-world data that shows immunocompromised individuals are more likely to have a lower response to the initial vaccine dosage and are more likely to experience breakthrough infections. According to the CDC, 40 - 44 percent of hospitalized breakthrough cases are immunocompromised patients.

The Physicians of Iowa Arthritis & Osteoporosis Center recommend receiving the 3rd dose of COVID -19 vaccine for all patients currently receiving oral, injectable and IV immunosuppressive therapy. Please see the table below for drugs that fall into these classes. This is not an all-inclusive list.

Actemra (tocilizumab)	
Arava (leflunimide)	Skyrizi (rizankizumab)
Benlysta (belimumab)	Sulfasalazine
Cimzia (certolizumab)	Taltz (ixekizumab)
CellCept, Myfortic (mycophenolate)	Tremfya (guselkumab)
Cosentyx (secukinumab)	Xeljanz (tofacitinib)
Cytoxan (cyclophosphamide)	
Enbrel (etanercept)	
Glucocorticosteroids (eg; prednisone at or above 20 mg daily)	
Humira (adalimumab)	
Ilaris (canakinumab)	
Imuran (azathioprine)	
Intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG)	
Kevzara (sarilumab)	
Kineret (anakinra)	
Methotrexate	
Olumiant (baricitinib)	
Orencia (abatacept)	
Otezla (apremilast)	
Prednisone 20mg/day or greater (other glucocorticosteroids)	
Remicade, Avsola, Inflectra, Renflexis (infliximab)	
Rinvoq (upadacitinib)	
Rituxan, Truxima (rituximab)	
Simponi/ Simponi Aria (golimumab)	
Stelara (ustekinumab)	

There has been recent confusion, as the CDC released information today, August 18, 2021 that they are preparing to offer administration of the 3rd COVID-19 vaccination to **the general public** (tentatively beginning in late September 2021). These people need to wait until 8 months after their 2nd dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine before receiving the 3rd dose. **THIS DOES NOT APPLY TO IMMUNOCOMPROMISED/IMMUNOSUPPRESSED PATIENTS.**

Immunocompromised patients should follow guidance provided in the August 13, 2021 announcement that they are eligible **NOW** as long as they are 28 days (4 weeks) past their 2nd vaccination dose. If you have doubt, contact your pharmacy for an appointment and be sure they are aware that you are in the immunosuppressed class according to the medications above.

Sincerely,

The Physicians of Iowa Arthritis & Osteoporosis Center