

Arthritis & the COVID vaccine: What you need to know

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(HealthDay)—Some arthritis drugs may reduce the effectiveness of

COVID vaccines, according to the Arthritis Foundation, which also offers advice on booster shots.

Research is limited, but evidence suggests that disease-modifying [drugs used for arthritis](#) may reduce the response of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, according to the foundation.

A small study of 133 fully vaccinated people taking [immunosuppressive medications](#) found that their antibody levels and ability to neutralize the virus were three times lower than in people not taking these medications.

However, "most patients in the study were able to mount antibody responses in response to SARS-CoV-2 vaccination, which is reassuring," study co-author Dr. Alfred Kim, an assistant professor of rheumatology at Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis, told Reuters.

The study was published on the preprint server MedRxiv, and has not been peer-reviewed.

No research on the one shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine in people taking immunosuppressive medications has been reported, according to the Arthritis Foundation.

"Not all medications that our patients take have been shown to have significant effects on responses to vaccination," said Dr. David Karp, president of the American College of Rheumatology, who suggested patients ask their [health care provider](#) if they are likely to see benefits from additional vaccination.

"Luckily, we have not seen any safety signals in patients with autoimmune and rheumatic diseases from the COVID-19 vaccines, so there should be no concern for the [third dose](#)," he said.

Karp added that it's still unclear how much protection a third or fourth [booster](#) provides to immunocompromised patients, such as those with cancer, organ transplants and those taking immunosuppressive medications.

So, even if these patients do receive additional COVID vaccine doses, they should continue to take precautions such as physical distancing and wearing masks, Karp advised.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [advises](#) immunocompromised patients who received an mRNA vaccine to seek third doses at least four weeks after their second shot. If possible, the booster should match their previous shots.

In other words, those who received two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine should stick to that for their third shot. Those who initially received the Moderna vaccine should get a Moderna booster.

Immunocompromised patients who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine should receive a second shot at least two months after their first dose. They can get a second J&J shot or an mRNA vaccine, the CDC says.

The Arthritis Foundation noted that there is some evidence that an mRNA booster may improve immunity in those who first received the J&J [vaccine](#).

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [COVID-19 vaccines for people with underlying medical conditions](#).

Parakkal Deepak et al, Glucocorticoids and B Cell Depleting Agents Substantially Impair Immunogenicity of mRNA Vaccines to SARS-

CoV-2, *MedRxiv* (2021). [DOI: 10.1101/2021.04.05.21254656](https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.04.05.21254656)

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