

Michigan Medicine Transplant Center
COVID-19 Vaccination Requirement for Transplant Candidates on the Waitlist

The COVID-19 pandemic has killed over 750,000 Americans to date. Fortunately, overwhelming evidence demonstrates that the **vaccines developed against COVID-19 are safe and effective in preventing hospitalization, critical illness, and death from COVID-19 infection**. Three vaccines have been approved under emergency use authorization in the United States, and one vaccine has full FDA approval. Over 5 billion COVID-19 doses have been given world-wide with a remarkably consistent record of safety and effectiveness.

People who receive an organ transplant need to take medications that suppress the immune system and make people more vulnerable to infection. In addition, many organ transplant recipients have other medical problems that increase their risk of severe COVID-19. For these reasons, organ transplant recipients have an increased risk of bad outcomes including death if they get COVID-19. The risk of severe illness and death due to COVID-19 among organ transplant recipients is similar to the risks due to COVID faced by elderly individuals aged 80 or older. In addition, many recipients who get COVID-19 can experience failure of the transplanted organ (for example a kidney transplant recipient having to go back on dialysis). While COVID-19 vaccines provide some protection when given after transplantation, **the vaccines appear to work much better when given before rather than after a transplant**.

To best protect our patients from serious disease, loss of the transplanted organ, and even death due to COVID-19, **the Michigan Medicine Transplant Center has determined that COVID-19 vaccination will now be required to be on the waiting list for a transplant**. You will need to have received the COVID vaccine to undergo transplant surgery. Your transplant professional at the Michigan Medicine will be happy to answer any questions you might have about COVID-19 vaccination. In addition, please see the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for more information.

FAQs

I have read a lot about possible side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines, and with my medical problems, I am concerned that the vaccine will harm my health. How do we know the vaccine is safe, particularly for people with health problems?

*While side effects can occur with any medical treatment, the COVID-19 vaccines have been given to millions of Americans and billions of people worldwide and have been shown to be very safe with serious side effects occurring in a very small number of people. Many of the rumors of serious side effects of the vaccine are not true, and **other non-live vaccines have never been shown to cause long-term problems that were not seen soon after administration**. People with serious health problems are at the greatest risk for severe disease if they get COVID-19, and in general benefit from the vaccine more than healthy people. Except for known allergy to*

components of the vaccine (exceedingly rare) there are essentially no medical reasons not to get vaccinated.

Will there be any exceptions to the requirement for COVID-19 vaccinations prior to transplant?

Critically ill patients requiring urgent transplantation may not have time to get vaccinated. In those cases, exceptions to the policy will be considered. Patients with proven severe allergy to ingredients in the vaccine – a very rare situation- will also be considered for exception.

I am already listed for a transplant, will I be removed from the list if I am not vaccinated?

Patients currently on our waiting list who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 have until February 1, 2022 to complete vaccination.. As of February 1, 2022, patients who decline COVID-19 vaccination will be made inactive on the waiting list (“placed on hold”) until they complete the COVID vaccine sequence. In other words, unvaccinated individuals will not be eligible for organ offers and transplant surgery as of February 1, 2022.

When will the requirement for vaccination go into effect, and how do I provide proof of my vaccination if I did not get vaccinated at Michigan Medicine?

We will require proof of COVID-19 vaccination by February 1, 2022. If vaccines were administered in Michigan, we should be able to view that in the electronic medical record. If administered outside of Michigan, other forms of proof such as the CDC vaccine card may be required.

How many COVID-19 shots are required to be considered fully vaccinated?

For the purposes of pre-transplant vaccination, we consider full vaccination 2 doses of mRNA (Pfizer or Moderna) or one dose of Johnson and Johnson. However, most patients with serious medical conditions should strongly consider a third dose of vaccine 6 months after the second dose of an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna), or 2 months after the Johnson and Johnson vaccine (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster-shot.html>).

I already had COVID-19, do I still need to get vaccinated?

Yes. In general, COVID-19 infection provides lower rates of protection from future infection with COVID-19 than vaccination. To best protect our patients, we require vaccination regardless of previous COVID-19 infection.

I have more questions about COVID-19 vaccination and the requirement for vaccination prior to being listed for transplant, how do I get more information?

Please message your care team through the Patient Portal or call the Transplant Center at 1-800-333-9013. We have a group of providers with specific training and expertise about the COVID vaccine who will listen to your concerns and provide additional information.