

What Kidney Patients Need to Know About the COVID-19 Vaccine

[Information referenced in this document was taken from the CDC website, see references on page 2 for more information.]

What is COVID-19 and how does it affect Dialysis Patients?

Coronaviruses are a type of virus known for causing the common cold. In late 2019, a new type of coronavirus was identified (COVID-19) that can cause a severe form of infection in some people. One of the major challenges to COVID-19 is that it can infect some people without causing any symptoms of infection, while others can have a severe, life-threatening illness. People who are older or have chronic health conditions (such as kidney failure) appear to be at highest risk for having the severe form of the infection. Compared to the general population, COVID-19 infections appear to be more common in dialysis patients AND the risk of dying from COVID-19 infection appears to be higher.

Preventing COVID-19 by Vaccination

Vaccines are used to help teach our body's immune system to fight off specific infection. There are now authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States and some important information you should know about:

COVID-19 vaccines DO NOT cause COVID-19 infection. None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently in development, or in use in the United States, contain the live virus that causes COVID-19.

Like any vaccine, the COVID-19 vaccine can cause some side effects. The most common side effects are injection site pain, muscle aches and even fever. These symptoms are normal and are a sign that the body is building up your defenses against infection ("immunity") but you still must let your dialysis team know if you have any of these symptoms.

You still need to wear a mask and practice safe social distancing after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. It typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. That means it is possible to become infected either during or after receiving your vaccine. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection.

People who have gotten sick from COVID-19 should still get vaccinated. At this time, experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. The immunity someone gains from having an infection, called natural immunity, varies from person to person. Some early evidence suggests natural immunity may not last as long as the immunity that occurs from the vaccine but there is still much to learn.

Getting vaccinated can help prevent getting sick with COVID-19. There is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you, but dialysis patients do appear to be at higher risk for severe infection and death. Infected people can also spread the disease to friends, family, and others around you without even knowing that you are sick. COVID-19 vaccination may help protect you by creating an antibody response without having to experience sickness or the actual infection.

What else can I do to prevent COVID-19 infection?



Image credit, CDC website

Dialysis patients are typically at least 6 feet apart from each other during their treatments, helping decrease the risk of spreading infection. In addition, it is critically important that you wear a mask whenever near other people (including during your entire dialysis treatment!) and limit large gatherings where you could come into contact with infected people without knowing it.

Are there treatments available to me if I have COVID-19?

In addition to getting lots of rest and using medications such as acetaminophen to control any fevers or muscle aches, there are now authorized treatments (called “monoclonal antibodies”) for people with symptomatic (such as fever, muscle aches, shortness of breath, etc.) COVID-19 infection that may help prevent you from getting sicker or needing hospitalization. Talk to your dialysis provider about this therapy to see if it might be right for you.

References:

Kooman JP, van der Sande FM. COVID-19 in ESRD and Acute Kidney Injury. Blood Purif. 2020; DOI: 10.1159/000513214.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits/facts.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/treatments-for-severe-illness.html>

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