

HEALTH

Health Department Recommends Additional Dose of COVID-19 Vaccine for Immunocompromised People; Upcoming Health Department Vaccination Events

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN – In alliance with updated guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Hamilton County Health Department recommends that immunocompromised individuals receive an additional dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine after the initial two doses. Studies indicate that moderately to severely immunocompromised people do not always build the same level of immunity after vaccination as non-immunocompromised people and may need additional protection against COVID-19. A third vaccination is not recommended for any other population at this time, and it is advised that no one receive more than three vaccinations.

This recommendations applies only to those who have received the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine; there is not currently enough data to determine whether those who have received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine should get an additional dose. Immunocompromised individuals are encouraged to speak with their healthcare provider to decide if getting an additional dose is appropriate for them.

People at risk of being moderately to severely immunocompromised include those who have:

- Been receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood
- Received an organ transplant and are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Received a stem cell transplant within the last 2 years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)

- Advanced or untreated HIV infection
- Active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids or other drugs that may suppress your immune response

An additional dose of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine should be administered at least four weeks after the second dose of the vaccine. The third dose should be the same manufacturer as the first two vaccines received. Per the CDC, if the mRNA vaccine product given for the first two doses is not available or is unknown, either mRNA COVID-19 vaccine product may be administered. To search for providers offering a specific brand of COVID-19 vaccine, visit [vaccines.gov/search/](https://www.vaccines.gov/search/).

Upcoming Health Department Vaccination Events

The Hamilton County Health Department is currently offering the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine and is able to accommodate immunocompromised individuals wishing to receive an additional dose, as well as anyone needing a first or second dose of the vaccine. Free Pfizer COVID-19 vaccination events are occurring at multiple locations this week. No appointment is necessary, and anyone 12 years of age and older is eligible. Visit [vaccine.hamiltontn.gov](https://www.vaccine.hamiltontn.gov) and click on “Vaccine Calendar of Events” to see the most up-to-date COVID-19 vaccine calendar. To accelerate the vaccination process, print and complete the vaccine encounter form available on the website.

The COVID-19 Hotline is available to assist with COVID-19 vaccine inquiries Monday through Friday, 8am to 4pm, at 423-209-8383.

U.S. to Recommend Booster Shots for Most Americans

There are now 169 million Americans vaccinated in the U.S., according to Our World Data. With the rise of the Delta variant, there has been a surge in the number of vaccinated Blacks and Hispanics. Blacks and Hispanics living in hard-hit states are now getting vaccinated more rapidly than whites. Mississippi saw the biggest increase among its Black population, with 5.8% compared to 4% of White people, Bloomberg notes.

However, fully vaccinated Americans may not be done getting shots. The Biden administration plans to recommend that most Americans get a booster shot eight months after they received their second dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, as the highly infectious Delta variant marches across the country.

Officials could announce the decision as early as this week, with third shots becoming available to those most vulnerable as early as mid-September, The New York Times reported.

What about Johnson & Johnson?

People who chose the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine will likely also need a booster shot, but officials are waiting for the results of the company’s two-dose clinical trial that are expected later this month.

Who will be first in line for the booster shot?

The first boosters will be given to nursing home residents, health care workers and emergency workers. Next up would be older people who were near the front of the line when vaccinations began late last year, followed by the general population. The plan is to give people the same vaccine they first received, the Times reports.

Why the need for a booster shot?

What has U.S. health officials worried? Data from Israel continues to suggest that the Pfizer vaccine’s protection against severe disease has fallen significantly for elderly people who got their second shot in January or February, the Times reported.

The latest data, posted on the Israeli government’s website on Monday, shows a continued erosion in the potency of the Pfizer vaccine against mild or asymptomatic infections in general and against severe disease among seniors who were vaccinated early in the year.

One slide suggested that for those 65 years or older who got their second shots in January, the vaccine is now only about 55 percent effective against severe disease. But researchers say the data has a wide margin of error, and some say other Israeli government data suggests a decline in efficacy was less severe, the Times reports.

“It shows a pretty steep decline in effectiveness against infection, but it’s still a bit murky about protection against severe disease,” Dr. Peter Hotez, a vaccine expert at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston who reviewed the data, told the Times.

Dr. Jesse Goodman, a former chief scientist with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, says the data shows “worrisome trends” that hint at waning efficacy. But he told the Times that he would like to see more detail from Israel and data indicating whether the United States is headed down the same road.

How will the booster shots work?

Federal officials say the U.S. booster program will almost certainly follow the same scenario as the initial vaccination program, the Times says. The first shots for

the general public in the United States were administered on Dec. 14, days after the FDA authorized the Pfizer shot for emergency use. People started receiving the Moderna vaccine a week later.

The regulatory path for additional shots is not entirely clear. Pfizer filed data to the FDA on Monday that showed the safety and effectiveness of a booster shot, but the data was preliminary. Moderna is also exploring the safety and efficacy of both a half-dose and a full dose as a third shot.

About 60% of the U.S. population has gotten at least one dose and nearly 51% are fully vaccinated, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That, in turn, has caused a shortage of intensive care unit beds, nurses and other front-line staff in areas that can no longer keep up with the flood of unvaccinated patients.

“That’s heartbreaking, considering we never thought we would be back in that space again,” Collins said on Fox News Sunday. “But here we are with the Delta variant, which is so contagious, and this heartbreaking situation where 90 million people are still unvaccinated who are sitting ducks for this virus, and that’s the mess we’re in. We’re in a world of hurt.”

In the meantime, the World Health Organization — citing a lack of global supply of vaccines — has objected to richer nations moving ahead with booster shots when citizens of many poorer countries have yet to receive even a first dose of vaccine.

FDA OKs Third COVID Shot for Most Vulnerable Americans

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration last week authorized a third “booster” shot of coronavirus vaccines for people with weakened immune systems, as the highly contagious Delta variant continues to surge across the country.

Expanding the emergency use of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines should help protect those patients who are considered most vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. The authorization includes people who have had solid organ transplants and those whose immune systems are equally compromised, the FDA says.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine wasn’t included in the authorization because there isn’t sufficient data yet on that vaccine, according to the agency.

Concern for the immune-compromised

With the booster dose approved, doctors will now have the leeway to give additional shots to vulnerable patients. About 3 percent of Americans have weakened immune systems for numerous reasons, from a history of cancer to the use of certain medications such as steroids.

“The country has entered yet another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the FDA is especially cognizant that immunocompromised people are particularly at risk for severe disease,” Acting Commissioner Dr. Janet Woodcock says in a statement. “After a thorough review of the available data, the FDA determined that this small, vulnerable group may benefit from a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines.”

“Other individuals who are fully vaccinated are adequately protected and do not need an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine at this time,” Woodcock adds while noting that the agency was “actively engaged in a science-based, rigorous process with our federal partners to consider whether an additional dose may be needed in the future.”

Despite the authorization, many scientists argue that the immunocompromised population is too diverse to uniformly recommend additional shots of coronavirus vaccine, the Times reports.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Study: TN Kids Need Help After COVID Learning Disruptions



Last spring, roughly 30% of elementary and middle-school students, and just over 35% of high school students, met grade-level expectations in science.

By Lily Bohlke

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - American kids are returning to school an average of four to five months behind in their learning, according to a new study.

Groups that support children’s well-being have said the pandemic has exacerbated the disparities in education that have existed for years. Chapple Osborne-Arnold, who works in Tennessee for the nonprofit Save the Children, said the hardest-hit students include those living in poverty and children of color, who are - on average - five to seven months behind.

“And then of course, in rural communities, especially here in Tennessee,” she said, “we are seeing those state test scores from the spring significantly drop compared to years past.”

She added that establishing and normalizing daily routines will be critical for students this fall. Most Tennessee kids start school this week.

In the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program results for this spring, less than one-quarter of students in third grade were meeting expectations for grade-level reading, and just 20% met expectations for math.

Shane Garver, Save the Children’s associate vice president for rural education programs, encouraged making sure kids have regular bedtimes and get enough sleep, as well as establishing environments that support homework and learning at home. He said extra support will be important for those who missed out on parts of their education last year.

“Things like after-school programs, additional tutoring programs and learning opportunities in the community are going to be critically important to supporting kids,” he said.

Osborne-Arnold added that Save the Children is partnering with school districts to help catch students up and provide wraparound services - through summer camps, after-school and even in-school programs.

“Tennessee is seeing a surge in COVID numbers,” she said. “So, I think routines now are going to be more important than ever, because no one wants another school shutdown.”

Benefits for transplant patients

Studies do suggest that patients such as organ transplant recipients often show little immune response to the standard vaccine dosing schedule, and so they could benefit from a third jab. One recent study by Canadian researchers found that a third dose of the Moderna vaccine improved the immune response of people in that group, the Times reports.

Dr. Dorry Segev, from Johns Hopkins’ Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, says about half of transplant patients have no antibody response to the currently authorized vaccine dosage, the Times reports. His team studied 30 transplant patients who were vaccinated but had negative or low-positive antibody [blood] titers, which pointed to a poor response by their immune systems to the shots. After an additional shot, 14 of them had higher antibody titers.

Although the vast majority of Americans who have been vaccinated got Pfizer or Moderna shots, it is not yet clear how those with immune deficiencies who received Johnson & Johnson shots are to proceed, the Times says.

Dr. Dan Barouch, a virologist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston who worked with Johnson & Johnson as it developed its vaccine, says the FDA’s move to make third shots available to some with weakened immune systems makes sense.

For more information on COVID-19 and booster shots, visit the CDC. (Source: by Jessica Daniels for BlackDoctor.org)