

Information about COVID-19 Vaccines for People Living with Liver Disease

Expert Guidance for Patients from the Toronto Centre for Liver Disease at UHN

People living with liver disease **are strongly encouraged** to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

This includes people with hepatitis B, hepatitis C, fatty liver, PBC, PSC, AIH, cirrhosis and other chronic liver diseases as well as those waiting for liver transplant and those who have already received a liver transplant.

The vaccines appear safe and effective.

What do we know about the new vaccines?

- The mRNA vaccines (Pfizer & Moderna) use a new technology that allows for faster vaccine design and production – these vaccines do not use a live virus and do not affect your DNA
- Other vaccines (eg. Oxford vaccine) use more standard vaccine approaches
- Two vaccine doses are required for maximum protection with these vaccines

What do we know about side effects?

- Mild side effects are common after each dose, similar to other vaccines and include pain/discomfort where the injection is given, fatigue, headache and low-grade fever – most often for 1-3 days
- Severe side effects were very rare in the studies that included over 30,000 people and no new problems have been seen as the vaccines have been rolled out around the world (millions of doses given)

Is it possible that there will be long-term side effects of the vaccine?

- Vaccine side effects usually occur early, most often within days to weeks after the vaccine, and almost always within the first 2 months after vaccination
- The risk of rare long-term side effects is extremely low
- Severe allergic reactions have rarely been reported – if you have had a severe reaction to other vaccines (anaphylaxis) or are required to carry medication for allergies, speak to a health care provider before receiving the vaccine

What about my liver disease?

- Having liver disease does not increase your risk of experiencing a side effect
- The medications you take for your liver disease, including any immunosuppression, should not be a reason to decline a vaccine, but may have a small effect on how well the vaccine protects you

Why do we recommend vaccination?

- People with liver disease, especially cirrhosis and possibly fatty liver, are at higher risk of getting very sick if they get COVID-19 infection, making it even more important to be vaccinated and be protected
- The vaccines are over 90% protective against symptomatic COVID-19
- The vaccines have been studied in people with liver disease with no safety concerns identified
- It is safe for people with impaired immune systems to be vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine
- The benefit of protecting yourself, and others, against the spread of COVID-19 far outweighs any potential risk

Do you still need to take precautions after vaccination?

- **Yes**
- The vaccine is much less effective after a single dose than after 2 doses
- Even though the vaccines reduce the risk of severe COVID-19, they are not perfect; even after vaccination, masks and physical distancing are still recommended
- It's always important to follow the latest public health advice and guidance

These recommendations were developed by the healthcare team and patient partners at the Toronto Centre for Liver Disease. We understand you might still have questions after reading this and if you do, please contact your doctor or nurse practitioner.

***Updated Jan 11, 2021**