**CORONAVIRUS INFORMATION FOR KIDNEY TRANSPLANT RECIPIENTS AND PRE-TRANSPLANT PATIENTS**

One year after the first case of COVID infection was detected in the United States, over 1 in 15 Americans have become infected, and 1 in 50 of those infected have died. For patients with suppressed immune systems on antirejection therapy after transplant, the risk of death has been even higher, up to 1 in 5 transplanted patients with COVID infection in NY state.

**Due to the very high chance of infection and severe complications after infection, Upstate Transplant Center has joined national transplantation medical societies as well as the US Centers for Disease Control in recommending that every kidney transplant patient receive vaccination against COVID infection.** Please see the recommendation from Dr. Anthony Fauci at this link:

**Frequently Asked Questions:**

1. **Is the vaccine safe?**

Yes. So far, after millions of doses given, there have been very few allergic reactions in people who already had many drug allergies. None of them has had a serious problem after the reactions were treated immediately. The main side effects for others include soreness at the vaccination site, fever, muscle aches, and fatigue, which are simply signs that the immune system of the body is recognizing the vaccine and responding to it. These symptoms may last for a few days after vaccination but then go away completely. For transplant patients, it is possible that the immune system might also make antibodies that can recognize the transplant, but this risk is very much less than the risk of not being vaccinated and having a serious COVID infection.

1. **Is the vaccine effective in transplant patients?**

Both vaccines now available in the US have been carefully tested in tens of thousands of people and shown to be more than 90% effective in preventing infection. There is no information yet on whether the vaccine is as effective in people with suppressed immune systems as in normal people. However, based on experience with other vaccinations like the flu and pneumonia vaccines, transplant recipients do respond to vaccination. Even if the vaccine does not completely protect you from getting COVID infection, it can decrease the severity of the illness so that you only have a mild case rather than one severe enough to need hospitalization.

1. **Do transplant patients qualify as being higher priority for vaccination?**

Yes, because their immune systems are weaker than those of normal people. Upstate Transplant Center can provide you with a letter confirming that you are a transplant patient on medications that lower the immune system and that you should be considered at higher priority for vaccination.

1. **Are there any differences between the types of vaccines available?**

The two vaccines currently available in the US are very similar and both are very safe and effective. There will likely be different types of vaccines available in the future. **The only thing that transplant patients need to ask about when receiving any kind of vaccine is if the vaccine includes any type of live virus.** If it uses live virus, then transplant patients should NOT receive that particular vaccine and should ONLY receive vaccines that do not use live virus.

1. **What if I am on the waiting list for a kidney transplant?**

Because you have kidney disease, your immune system is not as strong as that of a normal person, and you should be vaccinated. Vaccination will not affect your ability to receive a kidney transplant. Please contact the transplant center to let us know that you have received the vaccine so that we can keep track of you, just as we do for our transplant patients.

1. **Where can I get vaccinated?**

Upstate Medical University has launched the **Upstate Covid Vaccine Information Hotline,** offering 24/7 access to Upstate staff who can answer questions on the available vaccines designed to combat the COVID-19 virus. The Hotline will answer commonly-asked questions about vaccine safety and provide tips on how to find an appointment based on availability in your area.

**To reach the Upstate Covid Vaccine Information Hotline, call 315-464-3979 and select option #2.**

In addition to the hotline, you can email questions to CovidVaccineInfo@Upstate.edu. Staff will respond within 24 hours.

You can also contact your county health department directly online or by phone for information on the nearest available vaccination sites in your area.