



August 10<sup>th</sup> 2021

## **COVID Vaccine FAQ – Heart & Lung Transplant Recipients**

We hope you and your family are staying safe and well during this difficult time as we face lockdown once again. This time, unlike in 2020, COVID vaccination is available and building herd and individual immunity to this virus is at the forefront of all our minds. As such, we are receiving multiple inquiries here at the Heart Lung Clinic about vaccination. This FAQ has been created to assist in answering questions that you and your community health providers may have about the vaccination in transplant patients.

### **1. Is the COVID vaccination safe in heart and lung transplant patients?**

Yes, the vaccine is safe for heart and lung transplant patients. If you have not already, we recommend that you gain access to a vaccination at your closest vaccine centre. Your GP will be able to discuss the options with you in further detail. Both Pfizer and Astra Zeneca COVID vaccinations are safe for most heart and lung transplant patients. If you have a history of severe vaccine reactions or a condition called thrombophilia you should discuss this with your GP. Further information regarding vaccination including rare side effects is available here.

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/vaccine/Pages/after-vaccination.aspx>

There is no increased risk of a severe adverse reaction to COVID vaccination in heart and lung transplant patients when compared to the general population.

### **2. I have heard that the vaccine is not effective in immunosuppressed patients, should I still have the vaccination?**

The COVID vaccines, just like all vaccines, are likely to be less effective in immunosuppressed patients. Vaccines cause immunity to diseases by exposing the immune system to a part of a virus or bacteria, allowing the body's immune system to build defenses before it is exposed to the real disease. If you are immunosuppressed, the immune system is weak, and therefore less likely to have a strong immune response to a vaccine. You should however still be vaccinated because any protection is better than no protection, and with future additional booster vaccinations, the immune response is likely to become stronger.

### **3. Should my friends and family be vaccinated?**

Yes. One of the defenses for you against COVID is having the people around you vaccinated. When the majority of people in our community become vaccinated this is called herd immunity. Herd immunity is what we rely on to keep people in our community who are immunosuppressed, or cannot be vaccinated, safe from infectious diseases.

**4. I have read that due to limited efficacy of the vaccine in immunosuppressed patients, I should have a 'booster' vaccine, how can I access this?**

There is evidence emerging from overseas that immunosuppressed patients are less likely to have an adequate immune response to the COVID vaccine. You may have heard that some countries have started rolling out 'booster' vaccinations for immunosuppressed people and people who work closely with COVID patients. Currently in Australia, we are still in our primary vaccine roll out phase so there is not yet provision for third 'booster' vaccines. Here at the Heart Lung Clinic we do not provide the vaccination, and can only support people to be vaccinated at vaccine centres within the Australian Government guidelines. Please do not pressure our staff into providing documentation for you to try to access a third vaccine as these are not yet available.

**5. I have had both vaccinations. Should I have antibody testing to see if I am immune?**

Antibody testing is available in Australia but is not generally suggested as a routine test. A negative antibody test may indicate that the vaccine has been ineffective in providing immunity for you, however it may also indicate that your antibody level is just too low to be detected by the test. If it is important to you to know your antibody levels, then this test can be organised with your GP, we are unable to organise this through the Heart Lung Clinic.

**6. If I have negative antibody levels following vaccination, what can I do at this stage?**

It is likely 'booster' vaccinations will be available in 2022. In the meantime, we recommend taking precautions including social distancing, hand hygiene, and wearing a facemask when in public. We strongly encourage household members, family and friends to be vaccinated, to protect you and the community through herd immunity.

**Heart & Lung Clinic – St. Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst, Sydney**