



**COVID-19 VACCINATION Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Factsheet Week starting 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021  
FOR AUSTRALIAN PATIENTS WITH KIDNEY DISEASE, HAVING DIALYSIS OR WITH KIDNEY TRANSPLANTS**

**Who developed this FAQ Fact sheet?**

The Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology (ANZSN) is the Professional Society that represents health professionals (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, allied health, scientists and others) who look after people with kidney disease or kidney transplants. The ANZSN has a COVID-19 Working group who have developed this factsheet in collaboration with Kidney Health Australia.

**Do kidney patients get COVID-19 infection more often than non-kidney patients?**

Yes.

Patients with kidney disease often have weaker immune systems and can't fight against infections that well. So, if you have kidney disease you are more at risk of infection. Patients who are on special medications to dampen down their immune system are also at increased risk of infections. This includes patients with kidney transplants or inflammation of the kidney (nephritis).

**Do kidney patients who get COVID-19 infection get more severe disease than non-kidney patients?**

Yes.

There is now a lot of information showing that having kidney disease or a kidney transplant means you can get sicker with COVID-19.

**Should I get vaccinated against COVID-19 if I have kidney disease?**

Yes.

Vaccination is an important strategy to help reduce the chance of getting infected with coronavirus. You still might get COVID-19 after the vaccination, but you will be less likely to get severe disease or go to hospital. Kidney patients are a priority group. *We recommend that all people with kidney disease get vaccinated.* We know that patients with kidney disease are more likely to be infected with coronavirus and more likely to get sick. Patients receiving dialysis or those with a transplant are most at risk.

**Can I get COVID-19 from the COVID-19 vaccine?**

No.

Vaccination DOES NOT transmit infection. The vaccine does not contain the virus. Vaccines "show" tiny parts of the virus to your immune system so it can get ready to fight the infection if you are exposed to the virus.

**Will the vaccine change my genes or DNA?**

No.



The vaccine only teaches your immune system to fight the coronavirus. It does not change your DNA or have lasting effects on your genes.

**Does it matter which Vaccine I have? Do kidney patients need a particular one?**

No.

All vaccine types are suitable to use in people with kidney disease and kidney transplants. All vaccines types have an important effect on reducing your risk of serious infection and illness.

The vaccines have not yet been tested extensively in dialysis or transplant patients. Other vaccines do work in dialysis and transplant patients, but not as well (lower efficacy). As time goes by, we are learning more about exactly how effective the vaccines are in various groups of patients with kidney disease. We will be able to keep you updated on new information as it becomes available.

The exact vaccine you will receive will depend on what is available in your area or through your health service. The Pfizer vaccine requires very cold temperatures. This may not be suitable for some areas of Australia such as remote locations. Each area is developing the best vaccine plan.

**Am I a priority person to get vaccinated?**

Yes.

People aged over 70, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 55, and younger adults with health conditions (such as those with kidney disease, kidney transplants and receiving dialysis) are included in Phase 1b of the Australian Government vaccine rollout. See the Australian Government website link below to learn more about the phases of the vaccine rollout.

**Should I avoid the vaccine because I am on immune suppressing medications or have heart disease or diabetes or another health problem?**

No.

If you are on immune suppressing drugs, or have diabetes, heart disease or other serious health problems you are priority group 1b in the vaccine rollout (see above). You should get vaccinated – you are in a high-risk group to get sick from COVID19.

**Where can I get the vaccine?**

The vaccine rollout is underway. All Kidney and Transplant Units in Australia are working to find the best way to get the vaccine to their kidney patients. It will be different in each place.

Your kidney unit or healthcare workers will let you know as soon as they have more details on the rollout, feel free to contact them if you have questions. Your GP clinic may also be a place where you can get vaccinated.

**One Dose of the vaccine is enough for kidney patients because our immune system is low.**



No.

It is VERY important you have both doses to complete the vaccination. Incomplete vaccination will not protect you. So you should make sure you go back for the second dose.

### **What are the vaccine side effects?**

It is common to feel pain or some swelling and redness at the injection site after any vaccine. It is also very common to have flu-like symptoms after any vaccination. This means your immune system is responding to the vaccine. True allergic reactions to vaccines are extremely rare. If you have had allergic reactions to vaccines before please discuss with your doctor. For further information about the vaccines and potential side effects, please see the Australian Government website listed below.

### **Do I really need the second dose?**

Yes – you should have the second dose. Missing the second dose will stop the vaccine from working properly. You won't be fully protected. If you have any concerns after the first dose please talk to your doctor.

### **Can the vaccine cause my transplant to reject?**

No.

There have not been any reported cases of transplant rejection due to the vaccine.

### **Once I have the vaccine, do I need to be careful about getting COVID-19?**

Yes.

You should still do proper hand hygiene, follow the instructions for physical distancing and isolation that are recommended in your area. The virus may still be spread by people who have been vaccinated.

### **Once I have the vaccine, should I have the Fluvax?**

Yes.

You should still have the Fluvax and all other vaccinations your doctor recommends. Current recommendations are that you should have the Fluvax at least 2 weeks apart from the COVID-19 vaccination. This is in case you do get a reaction, so you will know which vaccine caused it.

### **Where can I get more information?**

The information we have is constantly changing so make sure you keep yourself up to date. Here are some websites with trusted and reliable information.

- Kidney Health Australia <https://kidney.org.au/covid-19-and-your-kidneys>
- Transplant Australia <https://transplant.org.au/>
- Australian Government <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines>



- Local Government Health Department Websites in your State or Territory.

We are also planning webinars and videos to keep you informed so please check Kidney Health Australia and Transplant Australia websites regularly.

**Please remember physical distancing, hand hygiene and masks are still very important to help protect you from COVID-19.**

***Important Notice***

*The COVID-19 pandemic and associated vaccination development is rapidly evolving, and information about SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 disease aetiology, treatment or prevention, including vaccine development and use, are emerging areas. The information and advice provided in this statement is to be considered in this context.*

*The ANZSN and KHA have each made reasonable efforts to ensure that the information and advice in this statement is as accurate and up-to-date as possible, however neither organisation guarantees or warrants, in any way, the accuracy, completeness, currency or source of any material in this statement.*

*The ANZSN reserves the right to change or add to this statement at any time in response to further advances in knowledge and practice concerning SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19 disease, its aetiology, treatment or prevention, including the development and use of vaccines.*

***Declaration of Interest***

*The ANZSN has received sponsorship from Astra Zeneca (who produces a COVID-19 vaccine).*