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Commissioner

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**Department of Health
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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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COVID-19 three-dose vaccine series for immunocompromised individuals recommended and available now

August 20, 2021 ANCHORAGE – The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) is encouraging all Alaskans who are immunocompromised to follow a national recommendation to get a three-dose vaccine series now and is also closely following news about a federal plan to offer booster doses starting in late September to all Americans who are already fully vaccinated with an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna).

These developments come as a result of new studies released this week by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showing decreased protections from a two-dose mRNA series for people with suppressed immune systems, as well as waning protection against infection over time for people who are not immunocompromised. Importantly, the studies also showed the vaccines still provide strong protection against severe illness, hospitalization and death. However, this new information, along with the high transmissibility of the delta variant, point to the need to strengthen the protections provided by the vaccines.

Available now: Third dose of mRNA vaccine for immunocompromised individuals

In accordance with the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), DHSS is currently recommending a third dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine for moderately and severely immunocompromised individuals to ensure adequate protection against COVID-19. This third dose of Pfizer or Moderna mRNA vaccines is applicable only to persons whose immune systems are moderately to severely compromised. This does not currently include people who have received the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine. Alaskans may talk with their health care provider about their medical condition, and whether getting an additional dose is appropriate for them.

The federal recommendation for a three-dose primary mRNA vaccine series for immunocompromised individuals was based on studies showing that many immunocompromised people are unable to mount a robust enough immune response after the initial two-dose primary mRNA vaccine series is completed. The additional dose reinforces and helps build the immune response to provide an acceptable level of effectiveness against a potential COVID-19 infection. This additional mRNA dose in a primary series should not be confused with a booster dose. Third doses are available to moderately or

severely immunocompromised persons throughout the state anywhere COVID-19 vaccines are provided.

Moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals include people 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 the immune response

Pending: Booster doses for persons fully vaccinated with an mRNA vaccine

A booster dose for the general public is not currently authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or recommended by ACIP. However, DHSS is beginning to plan for offering booster doses later this fall based on Wednesday’s announcement. It is anticipated that Alaskans will be advised to schedule their booster dose appointment starting eight months after their second dose of Pfizer or Moderna mRNA vaccines. Recommendations for the single-dose J&J vaccine will be forthcoming, pending the results of ongoing studies.

What can Alaskans do now?

Get vaccinated if you aren’t already fully vaccinated. “Choosing to get immunized against COVID-19 remains the single most important action Alaskans can take to protect themselves and their community,” said DHSS Commissioner Adam Crum. “We want to ensure that all eligible Alaskans have ample access, resources and opportunity to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Other mitigation efforts like wearing a face mask when needed, handwashing and physical distancing provide additional layers of protection.”

More information on the CDC’s recommendation for immunocompromised individuals is [available online](#). The CDC’s joint statement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services about planning for booster shots is [also available online](#).

To find a location and schedule an appointment, visit covidvax.alaska.gov or vaccines.gov.

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