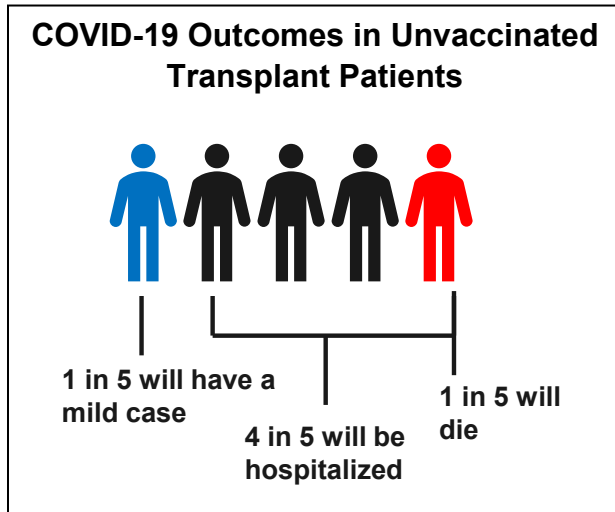


## COVID-19 Vaccines for Patients Waiting for a Transplant

### Why does UW Health want transplant patients to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

We want to give our patients the best chance of survival with their new organ. Outcomes are very poor for **unvaccinated** transplant recipients who get COVID-19. About 4 out of 5 will need to be admitted to the hospital. Of those, 1 in 5 will die (see image below). Vaccinated transplant recipients are much less likely to have severe illness from COVID-19.



### Are the vaccines safe?

Yes. The mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are very safe and have been well studied. Side effects are rare and less severe than the health problems caused by COVID-19.

### Why does UW Health want patients to get the COVID-19 vaccine before transplant?

Because it is much harder to develop immunity after your transplant. After your transplant, you need to take medicines to suppress your immune system to stop your body from rejecting your new organ. These medicines also make it hard for your body to build immunity from a vaccine. This means

you are more likely to get sick if you are exposed to an illness.

If you get your vaccine **before** transplant and before you start your anti-rejection medicines, you are more likely to get immunity to prevent severe illness.

### What are antibodies and why are they important?

When exposed to infection or disease, your immune system will start making antibodies to help fight off that disease. Vaccines tell your immune system to start making antibodies so that your body is prepared to fight a certain disease.

Nearly all people who receive the COVID-19 vaccine while not on medicine to suppress the immune system (such as patients **before** transplant) have antibodies to fight off COVID-19. When patients receive the vaccine **after** transplant, less than half of these patients will develop antibodies to fight COVID-19. This is why it is so important to get the vaccine before transplant when able.

### I had COVID-19. Why do I need to get the vaccine before my transplant?

After testing positive for COVID-19, your level of protection can vary. Your protection also lessens over time. The vaccine will give you an extra layer of protection. We want you to have the highest level of protection against getting severe disease.

**What are the other benefits of getting the vaccine before my transplant?**

After your transplant, you will be on a unit with other patients with weakened immune systems. By getting the vaccine before your transplant, you are protecting yourself **and** the other patients on your unit.

**Does UW Health ever make exceptions?**

Yes. Some patients (often those needing a heart or liver transplant) are very ill and may not have time to complete the vaccines before transplant. We will allow these patients to proceed with the transplant, but they must commit to getting the vaccine 60 days after transplant.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2021 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8223.