

Listeners' questions: COVID-19, boosters and more!

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LUNgevity recently hosted a [webinar](#) with leading experts, including Dr. Fred Hirsch (thoracic oncology, Mt. Sinai), Dr. Paul Bunn (thoracic oncology, University of Colorado) and Dr. Adolfo García-Sastre (virology, Mt. Sinai), to dive deeper into the science of COVID-19 and cancer. We also answered listener questions but ran out of time to answer them all! Here, I will answer your questions and provide the latest on what we know regarding third doses/boosters for the lung cancer community.

Can I get a flu shot and a COVID-19 shot on the same day?

Yes! Originally, the CDC and other medical experts advised spacing vaccines apart by at least two weeks. However, that guidance has now changed, and it is SAFE to get both shots on the same day. You may want to get them in separate arms though.

It is especially important for patients with lung cancer and those around them to get a flu shot this year. Scientists worry that the flu season could be worse than normal as people return to more normal activities, and patients with lung cancer can experience more severe outcomes from the flu. You can learn more [here](#).

Can I safely fly cross-country after getting my booster?

With the holidays rapidly approaching, many wonder how safe air travel is during the ongoing Delta surge of the pandemic. While the signs point to decreasing cases nationwide, we must still use common sense precautions to reduce the chances of getting infected. Just like with the other COVID-19 shots, you won't have full protection from the booster until a couple of weeks after your shot. You will want to continue wearing masks in public, maintaining social distance and avoiding crowds and washing your hands or using hand sanitizer often. When flying, you may want to consider upgrading your mask to an N95 or KN95, as these offer the best protection, followed by surgical masks. That being said, several studies have shown that air travel is relatively safe, even during the ongoing pandemic. [Here](#) is some additional guidance regarding travel.

How risky is it to continue to meet with my vaccinated friends whose family are not vaccinated?

The good news is that all the currently available vaccines (Moderna, Pfizer and J&J) remain very strong at preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death. That being said, your risk of a breakthrough infection does increase as you interact with mixed groups of vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Additionally, you could also transfer a breakthrough infection to unvaccinated individuals. If you decide to socialize in mixed groups, it is still preferable that you do so in outdoor settings or in well-ventilated areas where you can maintain distance. While indoors, you should remain masked except for when eating or drinking.

I have experienced changes in my menstrual cycle after getting vaccinated. Is this a side effect and will it impact my fertility?

There have been growing reports about changes to women's periods after they get vaccinated. While it's understandably worrisome for women, these changes do seem temporary. There is also no evidence that vaccination impacts a woman's fertility.

When will kids ages 5-11 be able to get vaccinated?

Pfizer has requested an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the FDA for its vaccine to be given to children ages 5-11. They have tested a lower dose (10 micrograms of mRNA, compared to 30 micrograms used for people ages 12 and up) and found it to be safe in clinical trials. The FDA will review the evidence and the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) will meet to discuss and make a recommendation on November 2-3. If approved, children ages 5-11 could start getting their first shots the first week of November, meaning they would not have full protection until 5 weeks later, in early December.

What's the difference between a third dose and a booster shot? Or are they the same? Who should get them?

Third shots and booster shots are NOT the same. We use third shots when talking about an extra shot given to people who may not have achieved an optimal response to their first two shots of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. Third shots are given to those who are considered "immunocompromised," such as patients with cancer who are on active treatment, those who have undergone organ or bone marrow transplants, those on immunosuppressive drugs, or those with HIV.

Booster shots are given to people who DID have a strong response to their first two doses but are now seeing their immune response weaken or fall off. This includes elderly patients (whose immune systems are generally weaker overall), those who got vaccinated very early in the initial roll-out (such as healthcare and other frontline workers), and those who may have other underlying conditions that put them at increased risk of infection and severe outcomes (for example, those ages 18-49 with heart disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma).

Who should get a third shot or booster shot?

At this time, any immunocompromised patient can get a third dose of either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine. Medical experts strongly encourage patients with cancer to get a third dose of vaccine at this time.

However, boosters are only approved for those who received Pfizer originally. If you believe you fall into the categories recommended for a booster, please discuss with your doctor. We are still waiting on the FDA and CDC to make a recommendation regarding boosters for those who got the Moderna and J&J vaccines initially.

Note that the general public is NOT advised to get boosters at this time. All three vaccines continue to provide strong protection against severe illness, hospitalization and death. Additionally, our immune response includes protection from antibodies made by B cells as well as cellular immunity from T cells.

What is the forecast for this winter?

Currently, cases of COVID-19 are decreasing nationally, which is encouraging. But we don't know what will happen as the weather turns cold and people are once again forced inside. Medical experts and

scientists worry that flu and COVID-19 cases could increase and that people could get infected with both viruses at the same time. To decrease this risk, it is advised that people continue wearing masks, avoiding crowds and washing their hands regularly to help minimize the spread of all respiratory viruses during the winter. Also, be sure to get vaccinated against both flu and COVID-19.