



Lupus News

Tips and information from the BWH Lupus Center

Third Doses of COVID-19 Vaccines Recommended for At-Risk Populations

by Emily Oakes and Dr. Helena Jonsson

Research now suggests that as time passes, the protection offered by the initial COVID-19 vaccine doses starts to fade and the risk of breakthrough infection rises. Additionally, immunocompromised people are more likely to have a lower immune response to the initial vaccine series and experience breakthrough infections. Booster doses of Pfizer and Moderna are now recommended by the CDC for immunosuppressed people, and it is expected that they will also recommend boosters for people who received Johnson and Johnson (J&J) vaccines this month. People with lupus on immunosuppressants are eligible for these boosters/repeat doses. Immunosuppressive medications commonly used in lupus treatment include high-dose corticosteroids (≥ 20 mg prednisone, medrol, solumedrol, etc. per day), cyclophosphamide, abatacept, rituximab, methotrexate, antimetabolites, tumor-necrosis factor (TNF) blockers, and other immunosuppressive agents. This does not include hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) alone. Patients should receive the same vaccine as their prior COVID-19 vaccine doses. The FDA and CDC approval processes were still occurring at the time that this newsletter was printed, so please check the CDC website (www.cdc.gov) for the most recent recommendations or reach out to your rheumatologist. So far, the known side effects repeat doses have been reported as similar to the original doses, with the most common symptoms being fatigue and soreness at the site of injection.

Please check with your rheumatologist about whether to take or hold your lupus medications around the time of the vaccine to try to get the best immune response. Patients should not withhold medication without medical instruction to do so.

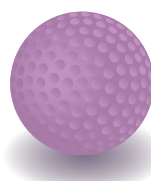
You can find more information about the COVID-19 vaccine recommendations at www.cdc.gov, and visit www.vaccines.gov or www.VaxFinder.mass.gov to find a vaccine distribution site near you. Individuals do not need a doctor's note to receive a third dose. ♦

LUCIN – Clinical Research Network

The BWH Lupus Center is participating in the Lupus Research Alliance's clinical research network, LUCIN (Lupus Clinical Investigators Network). The goal of LUCIN is to facilitate lupus clinical trial and studies, including trials of new therapies and treatment options. If you would like to be directly contacted about BWH Lupus study opportunities, please contact Emily Oakes at eoakes@bwh.harvard.edu.



Vozzy's Legacy for Lupus Update



Vozzy's Legacy for Lupus, a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising funds for Lupus patient assistance and research, celebrated their annual golf tournament on September 20th. The tournament was well attended and with the support of multiple sponsors, raised valuable funds for hundreds of individuals struggling with lupus, including some of BWH Lupus Center's own. We are thankful to Vozzy's for supporting our patients by their generous donations to the Lupus Patient Assistance Fund and look forward to next year's celebration!

Contact Us:

Phone: 617.732.5515

Fax: 617.732.5766

<http://bit.ly/bwhlupuscenter>

Karen H. Costenbader, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, Lupus Program

Elena M. Massarotti, M.D.
Director, Clinical Trials in Lupus

Candace H. Feldman, M.D., M.P.H.
*Director, Community Outreach
and Patient Engagement*

Laura Tarter, M.D.
*Director, Pregnancy and
Reproductive Health Program*

Peter H. Schur, M.D.
Director Emeritus

Paul Dellaripa, M.D.
Patricia Fraser, M.D.

Anna Helena Jonsson, M.D., Ph.D.

Deepak Rao, M.D., Ph.D.

Nancy A. Shadick, M.D., M.P.H.

Paul Hoover, M.D., Ph.D.

Derrick J. Todd, M.D., Ph.D.

Nicole Yang, M.D.

Brigham and Women's Hospital

Lupus Center

60 Fenwood Road,
Boston, MA 02115

To support us:

[https://tinyurl.com/
DonateBWHLupusCenter](https://tinyurl.com/DonateBWHLupusCenter)

To learn more about our
Lupus Research Program:

[https://lupus.bwh.harvard.
edu/](https://lupus.bwh.harvard.edu/)

New Drugs New Hope By Drs. May Choi and Elena Massarotti

Despite on the challenges with COVID this year, there have been exciting drug developments for lupus! For decades, there were few medications available to treat lupus. Now, we not only have more drugs, but also more treatment options for patients with more severe forms of the disease such as lupus nephritis, a leading cause of disability and premature death in lupus.

In December 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Benlysta™ (belimumab), a biologic drug approved for treating mild to moderate lupus in 2011, for the specific treatment of lupus nephritis. This medication can be given intravenously or by self-injection (subcutaneous) and blocks an immune system protein called B-cell activating factor that is elevated in lupus patients and involved in the immune system abnormalities seen in lupus patients. In a two-year clinical trial involving several hundred people with active lupus-related kidney disease, Benlysta combined with standard therapy (e.g., mycophenolate mofetil) was shown to be more effective

compared to placebo plus standard therapy.

Shortly afterwards, in January 2021, the FDA also approved the first-ever oral treatment for lupus nephritis called Lupkynis™ (voclosporin). It works by blocking a protein called calcineurin that normally causes T cells, an important part of the immune system, to become “active” and cause inflammation and damage in the kidneys in lupus nephritis. In a large trial, Lupkynis in addition to the standard lupus nephritis therapy mycophenolate mofetil worked better and faster than did placebo plus the standard treatment for lupus nephritis.

And just this past summer, the FDA approved Saphnelo™ (anifrolumab), a new treatment for moderate to severe forms lupus. This is an intravenous biologic medication that works by blocking a protein in the immune system called the type 1 interferon (IFN) receptor that is responsible for transmitting signals from type 1 IFN molecules, which are present in high concentrations in the blood and

tissues of people with active lupus and play a key role in lupus inflammation. Results from clinical trials showed that this medication, again in addition to conventional therapy, works better than placebo plus conventional therapy, especially for skin and joint disease and was also associated with patients being able to taper the dose of steroids needed to control disease. Anifrolumab has not yet been tested in patients with lupus nephritis or central nervous system lupus. Thus, all of these new lupus and lupus nephritis drugs are now approved to be used in addition to standard treatments, such as hydroxychloroquine and mycophenolate mofetil (but not other biologic medications). Please talk more with your rheumatologist if you are interested in these new therapies. These medications often require insurance pre-approval.

With this new wave of hope for lupus patients, we are optimistic that soon we will see even more safe and effective therapies to fight lupus! ♦



Introducing Dr. Alice Horisberger

The Brigham and Women's Lupus Center would like to welcome Dr. Alice Horisberger, who joins the Lupus Center Team as a research fellow. Dr. Horisberger has completed her residency in Internal Medicine followed by a fellowship in Allergy and Immunology at the Lausanne University Hospital, Switzerland. During her training, Dr. Horisberger developed a keen interest in autoimmune diseases, particularly lupus. She has joined Dr. Deepak Rao's lab team as a research fellow, working with Dr. Rao and in close collaboration with Dr. Costenbader. She is interested in studying the immune cells that drive autoimmunity and identifying early diagnostic tools to help diagnose systemic lupus erythematosus. Dr. Horisberger is here under the support of the Swiss National Foundation, Lausanne University Hospital, and Swiss foundation SICPA. She is very excited to have joined the Lupus Center Team and to be able to work under the supervision of world-renowned lupus specialists. She is looking forward to discovering Boston and the beautiful nature of the northeast USA. Welcome to the team, Dr. Horisberger!

BWH Lupus Studies

Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson Booster Vaccine Research Opportunity

A group of Brigham rheumatologists are conducting a study to evaluate the antibody response to a COVID-19 booster vaccine in people with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus. To participate in this study, you must be 18 years or older, fully vaccinated for COVID-19, and have not received a booster vaccine. You must also be on one of the following medications: methotrexate (Otrexup, Rasuvo, Rheumatrex or Trexall), mycophenolate mofetil (CellCept) or mycophenolic acid (Myfortic) or rituximab (Rituxan, Truxima, Ruxience, or Riabni). If you are interested in participating, you may be invited to participate in the study and receive a booster vaccine of the same brand of vaccine (i.e. Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson) you initially received. If you currently take methotrexate, mycophenolate mofetil, or mycophenolic acid, you may be asked to withhold your medication before and after receiving the booster vaccine. Participation includes 6 visits over 13 months and is reimbursed with a stipend of up to \$700. Interested patients should complete our interest survey here: https://redcap.link/covid_booster. Please contact Grace Qian, gqian1@bwh.harvard.edu or 617-264-5902, with questions. ♦

Upcoming Events

We continue to look forward to the Lupus Lights NE virtual meetings, which are monthly peer-led support groups for patients and families impacted by lupus. Meetings are held to ask questions, exchange tips, and garner support in the lupus community and are sponsored by the Lupus Foundation of America (LFA). They are typically held on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7pm. For more information or to inquire about the next meeting please contact Dawn Peters or Kelley Keefe at lupuslightsne@gmail.com.

The Arthritis Foundation is hosting the annual Jingle Bell Run this year to raise money for arthritis research and resources. The event will take place on Sunday, December 12th in Worcester, MA. Participants are welcome to run or walk the course and join in the holiday festivities. For more information, contact Erica D'Agostino at edagostino@arthritis.org or visit <https://www.arthritis.org/events/jbr>.

LUPUS LIGHTS
NEW ENGLAND