



Lupus News

Tips and information from the BWH Lupus Center

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To learn more about our
Lupus Research Program:

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

Questions for The Doctor

Q: What is the difference between a COVID-19 vaccine series and a booster?

A: The COVID vaccine series are the original vaccine doses received. For the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the initial vaccine series was 2 doses for most people and three doses for people with weak immune systems, including patients with lupus who take medications that suppress the immune system. The Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine series was only one dose but is no longer recommended – the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are preferred. This initial series provides the immune system with the basic tools necessary to protect the body against severe COVID-19 infection. People with weak immune systems received an extra dose as part of their initial series in order to maximize their protection. Over time, however, the immune response decreases and protection is gradually weakened. A booster shot is an additional shot given a certain period of time after the complete first series, with the goal of bringing the immune protection back up to the earlier optimum level. Initially, the Center for Disease Control recommended waiting 6 months before getting a booster. However, they have since changed their guidelines to recommend a booster shot after 5 months for most people and after 3 months for people with weak immune systems. Please get in touch with your rheumatologist if you are unsure whether you are due for a booster.

Q: What is PAXLOVID?

A: Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir+ritonavir) is an oral antiviral medication developed by Pfizer that has been authorized for emergency use by the FDA. In early trials, it has been demonstrated to reduce the risk of hospitalization or death due to COVID-19 infection by 89%, which is an amazingly strong level of protection. Patients that test positive for COVID-19 and are at a high risk of progression to severe COVID-19 infection are eligible to receive Paxlovid. This medication is now available by prescription only for patients who are immunosuppressed who get COVID. If you test positive for COVID, contact your doctor as soon as possible, especially if you are immunosuppressed for lupus. Your doctor can discuss Paxlovid and other options for treating COVID-19 with you.

Q: What is EVUSHELD?

A: Evusheld is a monoclonal antibody treatment that has shown to be effective in preventing COVID-19 infection. Similar to the vaccines, Evusheld treatment is a preventative measure used to increase an individual's immunity. This treatment is particularly useful for people whose immune systems may be weakened and fail to develop antibodies from the vaccines, which is common in many lupus patients on immunosuppressive medications. Right now, patients who are treated with rituximab or have received kidney or other organ transplants are eligible. More patients will become eligible this spring as supplies of Evusheld increase. If you are interested in receiving Evusheld, please contact your rheumatologist to see if you are eligible.

Q: Should I keep wearing a mask?

A: Yes. Although many cities have begun dropping their mask mandates, we highly recommend that you and the people you live with remain masked in public or when with other people, despite vaccination status. We have seen many breakthrough cases, meaning that people who are fully vaccinated are still getting COVID-19. Luckily, it looks like COVID is less severe if you have been vaccinated, so please also get all the vaccinations recommended for you. ♦

PRAISE Program: Participants needed!

"PRAISE" stands for *Peers in Rheumatology: Advocate, Inspire, Support, & Engage*. It is a peer-led mentoring program. The goal of our program is to help improve equity in care for patients with lupus and rheumatoid arthritis who identify as Black, Latinx, and/or Asian. We are looking for individuals 18 years or older who identify as Black/Latinx/Asian with lupus or rheumatoid arthritis to participate in the PRAISE program as a mentor or mentee.

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At-Home COVID-19 Antigen Tests Now Covered by Most Insurance Types

As of January 15th, Americans with private health insurance, who have previously been able to get COVID-19 tests covered in doctor's offices, pharmacies, and clinics with no cost sharing, are now eligible to get at-home antigen tests for no up-front cost or a cost that is reimbursed by their insurance. Insurance plans are required to cover 8 free over the counter at-home tests per covered individual per month. Free tests are available directly through the preferred pharmacies, retailers, or other entities of each particular insurance plan. **To guarantee that the full cost of the test can be reimbursed, verify with your insurance provider that you are purchasing the tests from the preferred network, as out-of-network charges may apply depending on insurance plans.**

Those that purchase a test and would like to be reimbursed will have to file a claim on their insurance company's website. For more information, please visit <https://www.cms.gov/how-to-get-your-at-home-OTC-COVID-19-test-for-free>.

Medicaid or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) programs also cover authorized at-home COVID-19 tests with no cost-sharing (free to individual). For Americans currently on Medicare, COVID-19 tests given in a doctor's office and ordered by a healthcare provider are also free, but at this time at-home antigen tests are not being reimbursed. However, every home in the United States is eligible to receive up to 4 free at-home COVID-19 tests. To order yours, go to <https://www.covidtests.gov/>. ♦



Project N95

Project N95 is a nonprofit organization effort working to provide equitable access to safety resources during the COVID-19 pandemic, including personal protective equipment such as masks, COVID-19 diagnostic tests, and other

equipment. When you visit <https://www.projectn95.org/>, you can find and purchase fully vetted N95 face masks and other equipment in a variety of sizes and styles. We highly recommend our lupus patients most at-risk for contracting COVID-19 use N95 masks when in public settings. If you feel like you are having difficulty affording masks, please contact the Emily Oakes at eoakes@bwh.harvard.edu. ♦



Emily Oakes joined the Lupus Center team in May of 2021 as a research assistant. At the Lupus Center, Emily works under the direction of Dr. Karen Costenbader on a variety

of research projects relating to lupus and other autoimmune diseases. She graduated from Brown University in 2021, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Public Health and English. Emily is originally from Boxford, Massachusetts. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, reading, and walking her dog.



Sciaska Ulysse is from Roselle, New Jersey, and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 2021. There she studied Neuroscience with two minors in Healthcare

Management and Chemistry. At the Lupus Center, she works with Dr. Candace Feldman on various projects that work to attenuate disparities within the field of Rheumatology and inequities in care experienced by minorities. In her free time, she can be found trying out new places to eat, working out at the gym, or learning more about the world around her.



Lin Chen joined the Lupus Center team in August 2020 and coordinates projects that focus on improving lupus diagnosis and treatment. She obtained her Bachelor

of Arts in Cell and Molecular Biology from Boston University in 2020. Originally from Southern Massachusetts, Lin enjoys reading, walking along the Charles River, and watching mystery shows in her free time.

PRAISE Program, continued

Mentors will participate in training and be paired with around 4-5 mentees. Mentors and mentees will connect over the phone or Zoom over 4 months, and take surveys at the beginning and end. Mentors will receive a stipend for interviews, mentoring and surveys. Mentees will receive a gift card for surveys.

Please reach out to Sciaska Ulysse (snulysse@bwh.harvard.edu or 617-264-5907) with any comments or concerns.

Programa PRAISE: ¿Se necesitan participantes!

"PRAISE" significa *Peers in Rheumatology: Advocate, Inspire, Support, & Engage*. Es un programa de tutoría dirigido por pares. El objetivo de nuestro programa es ayudar a mejorar la equidad en la atención de los pacientes con lupus y artritis reumatoide que se identifican como afroamericanos, latinos, y/o asiáticos. Buscamos personas mayores de 18 años que se identifiquen como afroamericanos, latinx, o asiáticos con lupus o artritis reumatoide para participar en el programa PRAISE como mentores o mentoreados.

Los mentores participarán en la capacitación y se emparejarán con 4-5 aprendices. Los mentores y mentoreados se conectarán por teléfono o Zoom durante 4 meses y realizarán encuestas al principio y al final. Los mentores recibirán un estipendio por entrevistas, tutorías y encuestas. Los mentoreados recibirán una tarjeta de regalo para las encuestas.

Comuníquese con Sciaska Ulysse (snulysse@bwh.harvard.edu o 617-264-5907) con cualquier comentario o inquietud. ♦

Lupus Research Opportunity

Researchers from the Brigham and Women's Hospital Lupus Center are conducting a research study to determine the effects of lupus on an individual's health. We are looking for people who have a lupus diagnosis and have received care from a rheumatologist (or other specialist) or primary care physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Faulkner Hospital, or 850 Boylston Street clinic in Chestnut Hill. Participation in the study involves the completion of a brief questionnaire on your current and past symptoms, available at <https://redcap.link/BrighamLupusHealthStudy> or by utilizing the QR code provided. There are no medications or study visits to the hospital involved or any direct benefits to study participants. If you would like to hear more about this study, please contact study coordinator Emily Oakes at eoakes@bwh.harvard.edu or (617) 525-8785. ♦



Meet the Newest Members of the BWH Lupus Center Team!