



NATIONAL KIDNEY
FOUNDATION®

Discussing Vaccines With Your Patients Living with Kidney Disease: A Guide for Healthcare Professionals

EDUCATE YOUR PATIENTS



Focus on why people with kidney disease need vaccines

- Kidney disease (including people on dialysis or with a kidney transplant), can weaken the immune system.
A weaker immune system makes it harder for the body to fight germs and can increase the risk of infection.
- People with kidney disease may be more likely to get very sick from infections that vaccines can help prevent.
- Vaccines can help lower the chance of severe illness and hospital stays, especially for people with kidney disease.

Discuss what vaccines they need and if they need boosters

- Vaccines often recommended for people with kidney disease may include flu, COVID-19, hepatitis B, pneumococcal, Tdap, and others.
- Because their immune system may be weaker, some people with kidney disease may need a different number of doses or a different vaccine schedule. Vaccinate as early in the course of kidney disease as possible. Responses are better with higher kidney function (measured by eGFR) and before immunosuppression begins (due to receiving a kidney transplant).
- Some people with kidney disease may need special dosing, an adjusted schedule, or boosters. Boosters are extra shots that help improve protection.
- Live weakened vaccines, such as MMR, varicella, and nasal flu spray, should be avoided by people with a weaker immune system. This can include people with a kidney transplant who take medicines to lower immune system activity.



Keep it conversational

- Ask what they have heard about vaccines for people with kidney disease.
- Let them know it is normal to have questions, especially when there is so much information to sort through.
- Explain the connection to kidney health. Kidney disease can make infections harder on the body, and vaccines are one way to help protect health.
- Make a clear recommendation based on the person's kidney condition and overall health. Suggest reviewing which vaccines are due.
- Talk with the patient or care partner about which vaccines can be given now and which ones need follow-up. Also discuss how to keep track of vaccine records, including whether online records are available.

Address common concerns

- If they worry that vaccines may hurt their kidneys, explain that recommended vaccines help prevent infections that can be serious for people with kidney disease.
- If they are too busy to make appointments, offer to coordinate vaccination with nephrology, dialysis, pharmacy, primary care, or transplant care when possible.
- If they worry about side effects, explain that mild side effects that last a short time are common. Let them know when they should call the healthcare team.
- If they are not sure which vaccines they have received, check the medical record, pharmacy records, or any vaccine documents they brought with them.

For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation

Toll-free help line: **855.NKF.CARES** or email: **nkfcares@kidney.org**