

Vaccination in SLE

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If you are living with lupus, or another chronic inflammatory disease, you have a higher chance of getting infections and getting sick. The increased risk is due to how your body responds to infections, other health issues you may have, and any medications you are taking. Vaccines play a crucial role in preventing many infectious diseases, which is why they are recommended for people with these conditions.

During the fall months, vaccines are available to protect against Influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), and COVID-19. These viruses are more common in winter, making this an ideal time to consider vaccination. Below is some information on each vaccine. Always consult your rheumatologist about timing of vaccination and risk/benefit with your specific situation. They can help you decide what is right for you. If you have skin involvement or rash with your lupus, it is recommended to avoid having vaccines injected into the affected area.

INFLUENZA (THE FLU): The flu is a virus that typically causes fever, muscle aches, fatigue and cough. It's sometimes confused with colds or stomach bugs, but the flu itself can be quite serious and severe especially for certain populations. It is recommended that all people with lupus receive their annual influenza vaccination as it can reduce FLU infection, symptoms, related hospitalization and serious complications. You cannot get the FLU from the vaccine, and studies have shown that the influenza vaccine is generally well-tolerated, effective and has not been found to worsen disease activity in people with lupus. It is free to everyone in Ontario with a health card annually and targets the current strain circulating.

COVID-19: While we may not be testing and tracking COVID-19 like we did during the pandemic, the virus can still cause severe symptoms and illness, ranging from mild to severe respiratory, gastrointestinal, fever, headache and general fatigue symptoms. Even if you experience mild or no symptoms, you can still spread the virus. The COVID-19 vaccine is generally well-tolerated and safe in people living with lupus. Some lupus medications can significantly reduce the effectiveness of the vaccine, but it is still recommended. Timing the vaccine with your treatment schedule can improve its effectiveness, so consult your rheumatologist for the best timing. You can receive a vaccine as long as you have not had another COVID-19 vaccine or COVID infection within the last 3-6 months.

RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS(RSV): RSV often causes mild "cold" symptoms but can lead to serious illness in the lungs and airways for infants, young children, older adults, and those with other health conditions or weakened immune systems. Infection can take place multiple times throughout one's life and spreads through droplets from coughs, sneezes or touching contaminated surfaces. The Ontario government only funds this vaccine for certain populations. Having a rheumatological diagnosis or being on immunosuppression does not qualify you for coverage. Visit Ontario.ca or ask your doctor or pharmacist if you qualify for a free vaccine. The cost for those not covered is around \$250-\$300. The vaccine, available with a doctor's prescription for those over 60, provides protection that should last over a year, though the exact duration for a booster is still unknown.

References:

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Website sources:

- [Respiratory Syncytial Virus \(RSV\) Fact Sheet for Health Care Providers \(ontario.ca\)](#)
- [Respiratory Syncytial Virus | ontario.ca](#)
- [The flu | ontario.ca](#)
- [COVID-19: Symptoms, treatment, what to do if you feel sick - Canada.ca](#)