FDA approves supplemental doses of COVID-19 vaccines for some immunocompromised individuals

What you need to know

The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved allowing a third, supplemental dose of two COVID-19 vaccines for certain immunocompromised individuals who need extra protection. The supplemental vaccines are currently approved for Pfizer (ages 12-over) or Moderna vaccines (ages 18-over). Health agencies are also studying the safety of supplemental doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Several recent studies have shown that a third mRNA vaccine dose is safe to administer to organ transplant recipients and can increase antibodies in some patients who responded poorly to the first two doses of the mRNA vaccines, leaving them more at risk despite being fully vaccinated. Dr. Mark Meeker, vice president for community medicine, OSF HealthCare Multispecialty Group says the expanded emergency use authorization (EAU) includes patients who have suppressed immune systems because of cancer treatment or because they underwent an organ transplant.

"They're very specific with this booster because data is still coming in. There have been studies done at university centers, studying people with solid tumors, for example, people with transplants, and they have found that the third shot really does enhance their response to the vaccine." (:19)

**A complete list of conditions that qualify under the EAU is available on our website. Dr. Meeker says they cover a group of patients for which there is enough data.

"Right now, based on the data we have available, the CDC is recommending that you continue the series with the first vaccine that you had received. If, however, you have trouble accessing that particular brand of vaccine – you cannot access it or there's a supply issue – then they recommend you get the other one rather than nothing at all. The third booster needs to be at least, for both of them, 28 days after that second shot." (:25)

According to Dr. Meeker, this targeted group of people represents about three percent of the population -- group for which there is enough data to review.

"We knew by the nature of their illness, or their situation, that they may not have responded adequately to the first two doses. So that was studied early on and we now have the data in that shows that is indeed the case – a lot of those patients didn't respond well enough to the first two doses, and the third shot indeed makes a significant difference in a lot of them." (:23)

Dr. Meeker says more research is underway to gather data to support boosters for the rest of the vaccinated population. Supplemental vaccines will be available through local OSF HealthCare providers, but if patients want to receive them at retail pharmacies or county public health clinics, they won't need a medical referral. However, he thinks it's a good idea to check with your medical provider.

"I would highly recommend you give them a call, send them an email – however you communicate with your care team – and ask them for advice about this booster. At OSF, we have the vaccine available through all of our clinics so if you have an OSF physician for APP (advanced practice provider), you'll have access to the booster if you qualify." (:20)

OSF is also currently offering COVID-19 vaccinations on a walk-in basis with no appointment needed at select OSF Medical Group and OSF PromptCare locations.

The FDA announcement comes as the highly contagious delta variant is represented in an increasing number of cases. The variant now represents about 87% of all new cases in the U.S. – up from 14% in early June, according to

the CDC.