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# MONTANA KIDNEY NEWSLETTER

## Why Vaccines are Important for People with CKD

Kidney disease can weaken the immune system. That means common infections, like **flu or COVID-19**, can hit harder and lead to more serious complications. Vaccines help lower your risk of getting sick and protect your kidney health.

Vaccines are also especially important after a kidney transplant. The medicines that protect your new kidney also weaken your immune system, making it harder to fight off infections. Vaccines act as an extra layer of defense to keep you healthy and protect your transplant.

## 5 Common Myths About Vaccines

Vaccines are safe and effective, but myths can make people hesitant.

### Myth 1: Vaccines aren't safe!

Some may worry that vaccines aren't safe, but vaccines are among the best-studied and safest medicines available. "Vaccines are extremely rigorously studied for years and in millions of people," explained Dr. Werbel. "Vaccines are better studied than most of the prescription medicines people take every day."

Getting vaccinated also won't interfere with kidney medicines or dialysis. If necessary, your healthcare team may adjust the timing or type of vaccine.

### Myth 2: Vaccines change your DNA!

One of the biggest myths about mRNA vaccines is that they can enter your cells and change your DNA.

"mRNA vaccines **do not** change DNA," explained Dr. Werbel. "mRNA vaccines are a blueprint for a small piece of a virus, not the whole virus and not something that can make you sick."

This blueprint stays in a separate part of your cells and is short-lived. It triggers a small immune "alarm" that helps your body fight infections more effectively.

### **Myth 3: I don't need vaccines if I'm healthy**

For people with kidney disease or a kidney transplant, vaccines can prevent serious illness, hospitalization, or complications from infections like flu or COVID-19.

"Vaccines aren't just about keeping yourself safe. They help protect your family, friends, and community, too," said Dr. Werbel. "We recommend that the friends and family of people with CKD get vaccinated to help protect their loved ones."

### **Myth 4: Vaccines cause the disease they're meant to prevent!**

You may feel a little sick or sore after a vaccination. But this does not mean you now have the illness you're trying to prevent. This is your immune system hard at work getting its practice.

"These side effects can be annoying," said Dr. "But they are short-lived and much milder than the disease itself."

### **Myth 5: I've had the disease before, so I don't need the vaccine!**

Vaccines strengthen your immune system and help prevent reinfection or more severe illness, even if you've already had an infection.

"Having had the disease doesn't give you perfect immunity," said Dr. Werbel. "That's why you need vaccine boosters. The body needs periodic reminders."

## **Talk to Your Healthcare Team!**

Vaccines are an essential part of staying healthy, especially for people with chronic kidney disease or a kidney transplant. The best way to protect yourself is to talk with your doctor or kidney care team about which vaccines are right for you and when you should receive them.

#### **For more information and resources, visit:**

- Vaccine Integrity Project
- IDSA Immunization Resources
- Emerging Pathogens of Concern in Immunocompromised Persons (EPOC) Study.
- Have more questions?
- Get answers from a trained professional with NKF Cares.
- Call our toll-free number at 855-653-2273

**Source: Kidney Health, National Kidney Foundation**



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