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Dept. of Health Clarifies Third-Dose Vaccine Availability, Apologizes for Any 'Mixups'

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The Dept. of Health on Monday said that third-dose vaccination for the immunocompromised was indeed being offered at the territory's Community Vaccination Centers and private providers after some residents said they were turned away by both private providers and the CVCs.

"I do apologize for any misinformation or mixups in the community," said D.O.H. Infectious Disease Specialist Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar. "Yes, we actually presented and provided direction and guidance to all of the vaccination providers including the CVCs (Community Vaccination Centers), informing exactly what the procedure is regarding the third dosage for the immunocompromised..."

On the third-dose vaccine availability, she explained, "Anyone who is eligible for receiving a third dose should receive a note from their physician provider or a prescription and present that to the vaccinating provider or the CVC and they will be issued that third dose. It has to be something that the vaccinating provider can use to validate that [the patient] meet the criteria in a form of a note or the prescription." The patient must have also received their second dose of a Covid-19 vaccine four weeks prior to seeking the third dosage, Dr. Hunte-Cesar stated.

[Last week](#), D.O.H. announced the availability of third-dose Covid-19 vaccine shots for immunocompromised individuals.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the third-dose shot from Pfizer and Moderna to help boost response of immunocompromised people who had received a solid organ transplant or persons who have been diagnosed with conditions that are considered to be equal to a compromised immune system.

In a release issued Thursday, D.O.H. said the third dose must be administered 28 days after a second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. "For multi-dose vaccines, the same vaccine product should be used for additional doses. This means that if you received two doses of the Moderna vaccine, once you meet the criteria for a third dose, the Moderna vaccine should be administered. You should not mix vaccine types. The Department of Health highly recommends keeping your vaccination card in a safe place that is accessible," D.O.H. said.

Currently, the CDC considers the following moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals, according to D.O.H.:

- Been receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood
- Received an organ transplant and are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Received a stem cell transplant within the last 2 years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
- Advanced or untreated HIV infection
- Active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids or other drugs that may suppress your immune response

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said she was pleased to have the third dose option available to Virgin Islanders with compromised immune systems, which she said will improve the response to their initial two-dose vaccine series.

Currently, the CDC does not recommend additional doses to other populations outside of the immunocompromised, but Health and Human Services (HHS) has announced a plan to begin offering booster shots in the future. "As the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) continues to share recommendations, local health officials will inform the public on changes to vaccination protocols," D.O.H. said.

The department also recommended that patients speak to their healthcare provider about medical history to determine whether the criteria for the third dose has been met. "I'm encouraging everyone, especially those with weakened immune systems, to get vaccinated. We should all continue washing our hands frequently, maintaining social distancing, and wearing our masks,"

Ms. Encarnacion said.

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