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NMDOH highlights guidance for immunocompromised patients and booster doses of COVID-19 vaccine for special populations

SANTA FE - The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) today announced an enhanced COVID-19 tool kit for a subset of immunocompromised New Mexicans. Among the updated recommendations are increased access to treatments, continued mask wearing, and an additional booster vaccine for severely immunocompromised individuals, transplant recipients, and those in active cancer treatment.

“Hospitalizations and case counts are down, but we need to be mindful of those in our communities at higher risk for severe outcomes associated with COVID-19, including the immunocompromised and those with chronic illnesses,” said Acting NMDOH Cabinet Secretary David R. Scrase, M.D. “We demonstrate our support by recommending additional boosters to those eligible, increasing access to treatments, and calling on all New Mexicans to respect that many will continue to wear masks indoors.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initially suggested an additional dose for the more vulnerable population earlier this year, after determining the protective value of the vaccine against emerging variants. The recommendation that moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals receive a COVID-19 booster dose is further specified by the CDC [here](#).

Individuals are considered to be moderately or severely immunocompromised if one or more of the following is true:

- They are receiving active chemotherapy or radiation for tumors or blood cancers
- They have received an organ transplant and are taking anti-rejection medication
- They have received a stem cell transplant within the last two years
- They have a primary immunodeficiency syndrome such as DiGeorge syndrome or Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome
- They have advanced or untreated HIV

- They are taking high dose corticosteroids, e.g., more than 20 mg of prednisone each day or medicines like methotrexate for rheumatoid arthritis
- Some other immune-suppressing medications may qualify; individuals should talk to their doctor or call the COVID-19 hotline at 1-855-600-3453 (press option 3) to determine if their medications qualify them for a fourth dose

In addition to boosters, there are COVID-19 treatments which can offer substitute antibodies to restore, enhance or mimic the immune system's attack on pathogens. Evusheld is a new, long-acting monoclonal antibody therapy that is widely available for immunocompromised individuals such as cancer patients and transplant recipients. More information on Evusheld can be found [here](#).

NMDOH also encourages all New Mexicans to order free at-home COVID-19 tests to have on hand in case of exposure. Getting a fast COVID-19 diagnosis offers individuals the opportunity to seek immediate treatment, such as at-home oral treatments, within a critical 5-day window. To locate tests for delivery or pick up, visit: [FindaTestNM.org](https://findatestnm.org).

Another critical tool to offer protection to vulnerable New Mexicans is the continued use of well-fitting, high quality masks. NMDOH recommends and supports the use of masks for all those who are immunocompromised, have chronic health illnesses, and their caregivers. KN95 and N95 masks will provide the most protection, and are available at retail pharmacies and community health centers across New Mexico, for free while supplies last.

For more details on NMDOH recommendations for very vulnerable and/or severely immunocompromised New Mexicans, please visit: <https://cv.nmhealth.org/extra-protection/>

For more information about CDC vaccine guidance for these individuals, please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html>.

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NMDOH

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The Department of Health works to promote health and wellness, improve health outcomes, and deliver services to all New Mexicans. As New Mexico's largest state agency, DOH offers public health services in all 33 counties and collaborates with 23 Native American tribes, Pueblos and nations.