

May 3, 2021

Dr. Mathew Tunis
Executive Secretary, National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)
Adjunct Professor, School of Epidemiology and Public Health
Alta Vista Campus
600 Peter Morand Crescent, Room 101
Ottawa, Ontario K1G 5Z3
Email: matthew.tunis@canada.ca

Dear Dr. Tunis,

We are writing on behalf of Canadians living with rheumatic diseases on immunosuppressive medications.

Like in the cancer community, Canadians living with the worst forms of autoimmune arthritis have experienced significant isolation and anxiety over the last 14 months. Along with trying to mostly self-manage their disease, they have lived with additional burdens brought on by the pandemic, including challenges accessing and adjusting to different ways of receiving needed health care services, medication shortages due to a number of their treatment armamentarium being used for COVID-19 treatment, and fear of greater risk of more severe infection, hospitalization and death should they become infected by COVID-19.

Vaccines offer the opportunity to provide protection from the virus to this clinically extremely vulnerable group and ease the heavy toll it is has taken on their health, both physical and mental.

Our organizations strongly support the Canadian Rheumatology Association [Position Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination](#). Their recommendation on the second dose of the vaccination for Canadians living with arthritis who are immunocompromised and immunosuppressed is highlighted below:

The CRA advocates for early prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination for individuals receiving immunosuppressive treatments. The CRA also recognizes emerging evidence that points to suboptimal antibody response after first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in these patients. In order to optimize benefit of vaccination, the CRA advocates that the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine not be delayed for immunosuppressed patients.

We understand the challenges the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) faces in making recommendations on the vaccine schedule with limited supply and ongoing waves of the pandemic disease, thus, we support the goal to optimize early vaccine rollout and population protection. As vaccine supply increases and becomes more stable, we ask that NACI follow the CRA recommendations and the evidence on the timing of the second dose.

We thank the Committee for its ongoing efforts in this constantly evolving environment. Recommendations from NACI have great influence on vaccination strategies implemented by the provinces and territories. We look forward to your response.

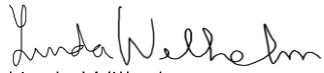
Sincerely,



Dr. Siân Bevan
Chief Science Officer
Arthritis Society



Cheryl Koehn
Founder & President
Arthritis Consumer Experts



Linda Wilhelm
Volunteer President & person living with RA
Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance



Wendy Gerhart
Executive Director
Canadian Spondylitis Association

