



Dear USDH IBD Patient,

The COVID19 virus has caused tragic harm and death in our communities and continues to do so with increasing rates of infection, here in December 2020. Beginning 14 DEC, a novel mRNA vaccine developed and manufactured by Pfizer and a second similar vaccine developed and manufactured by Moderna received Emergency use Authorization and are being distributed in the United States. These vaccines require 2 doses but after 2 doses are about 95% effective at eliminating symptomatic COVID19 infection. There are currently a total of five vaccines that have completed or are near complete the final phase (phase 3) of clinical testing in the United States, including the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

Patients with Inflammatory Bowel Disease have a dysfunctional immune system and often take medications to suppress immune function, theoretically at least putting them at greater risk for infection but also potentially greater risk for side effects with a medication that interacts with the immune system, like a vaccine. This has caused some alarm in our community of IBD patients about if and when they can or should be vaccinated against COVID. We are writing to you in an effort to give the best guidance available from our national and international experts at NIH, NAID, CDC, and WHO regarding COVID19 vaccination.

There have not been any specific research studies to date with COVID19 vaccination in IBD patients, or patients taking medications suppressing their immune system. This is not unusual early in vaccine development and these studies will be forthcoming, but will just be getting underway in 2021. None of the 5 early candidates for use in the United States is a "live" attenuated virus. As many of you know, taking live attenuated virus vaccine on immune suppressing agents is not recommended. Given that none of these vaccines is this type, then all 5 of the candidates are likely safe to take and will NOT give you COVID19. It is known that vaccines can cause common side effects like muscle aches, headaches, even chills or low grade fevers. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are no different, especially at the second dose with up to 15% having these types of side effects for 12-48 hours on average. However, with both of these vaccines, there have been no long term side effects reported as yet.

With regards to effectiveness, as above there is no definitive data yet. However, if we look at other vaccines like Pneumonia vaccine and compare effectiveness, we typically see a slight

(about 10%) reduction in effectiveness for patients taking immune suppression. Therefore, as is recommended by the CDC, mask wearing and social distancing will still be required for some time after you are vaccinated until enough of our community acquires immunity and the spread of the virus is suppressed.

In summary, COVID19 vaccines appear to be safe, and are likely effective in IBD patients taking immune suppression but there is just no definitive data to be certain. This data likely will not be available in 2021. National experts like Dr Anthony Fauci at NAID and others have gone on record that in their expert opinion, immune suppressed patients should get vaccinated with whichever approved vaccine is available to them first. At USDH we will be following the expert opinion and recommendations of the PA Department of Health and the CDC and since vaccination is recommended by these leading health institutions will also recommend it for our IBD patients who are able.