

## **Suggestions for adult patients with autoimmune rheumatic diseases on COVID vaccine**

Autoimmune rheumatic diseases (ARD) is caused by imbalance of the immune system. Most patients are required to take immunosuppressants for control of the disease. It is understandable that some patients may have concern about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine. The Hong Kong Society of Rheumatology put forward an important consensus after in-depth discussion among rheumatologists based on the latest scientific evidence. Here are some of the suggestions for you to understand more about the vaccine. If you have any questions, please consult your rheumatologists and nurses.

### **Are ARD patients at a higher risk of COVID-19 infection?**

Patients with ARD are more likely to have infection in general due to autoimmune diseases and immunosuppressive drugs. There is some evidence to suggest they can get infection with COVID-19 easier than the general population.

### **Is it more likely to have a severe illness if ARD patients get infected with COVID-19?**

There is some evidence that people with autoimmune rheumatic disease will develop more severe illness than the general population.

### **Should ARD patients receive COVID vaccine?**

COVID-19 is a new disease. Human beings have no immunity against it. It is therefore recommended that all patients with stable ARD to receive the vaccine. If you get vaccinated, you will be less likely to get COVID-19 infection. Even if you get infected, it is more likely to be a milder illness. Please note that ARD is not a contraindication to receive COVID vaccine.

### **Is COVID-19 vaccine effective for patients with ARD?**

Immunosuppressants may reduce the efficacy of vaccines which varies depending on disease severity and type of the drugs. It is believed that COVID-19 vaccines offer sufficient ? reasonable protection against COVID-19 infection. Safety of COVID-19 vaccine is not affected by the use of immunosuppressants.

### **Can COVID-19 vaccine affect ARD?**

There is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 vaccine will cause flare up of rheumatic diseases or result in more adverse event. International large scale studies did not report increase in risk in patients with ARD. Ongoing surveillance is underway to collect such data. COVID-19 vaccines currently available in Hong Kong do not contain active virus. Therefore, they will not cause COVID-19 infection.

### **Should immunosuppressants be stopped before vaccination?**

There is no evidence that stopping immunosuppressants will enhance the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccine. However, patients should discuss with their rheumatologists if you are taking potent immunosuppressants or anti-CD20 biologic therapy.

### **Is it safe after COVID-19 vaccination?**

COVID-19 vaccine is not hundred percent effective. Certain patients may have reduced vaccine efficacy due to the use of immunosuppressants. Therefore, it is always important to wear masks, wash hands and practise social distancing even after you are vaccinated to protect yourself and others.

Source: The Hong Kong Society of Rheumatology Consensus Recommendations for COVID-19 Vaccination in Adult Patients with Autoimmune Rheumatic Diseases

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