



## **AES Statement for Health Care Providers on COVID-19 Vaccination for People with Epilepsy**

**Updated August 31, 2021**

The American Epilepsy Society (AES) believes that COVID-19 vaccines are important for people with epilepsy, and for most, COVID-19 infection poses greater and more serious risks than the vaccine. AES provides the following information and resources to assist epilepsy health care providers in helping patients understand the importance of vaccination.<sup>1</sup>

AES recommends that epilepsy care providers encourage people with epilepsy to take the COVID-19 vaccination when they have the opportunity to do so, in consultation with their health care providers about individual considerations, and that providers actively educate people with epilepsy, families, and caregivers about the vaccine and address concerns or questions using the most up-to-date information from recognized sources. AES does not recommend medical exemption from COVID-19 vaccination in patients with epilepsy in the absence of complicating medical factors.

COVID-19 vaccines approved in the United States under U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) emergency use authorizations help prevent COVID-19 infection and have met rigorous scientific safety and effectiveness standards in clinical trials.<sup>2-4</sup> Further, as vaccination rollouts expand, the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are closely and proactively monitoring all aspects of safety and effectiveness and adjusting guidance accordingly.<sup>5</sup>

To date, CDC guidance has not included epilepsy among underlying medical conditions associated with high risk for severe COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> The American Academy of Neurology (AAN) stated that data are not yet available to support evidence-based recommendations on the implications of vaccination for specific neurologic diseases, and epilepsy without other complicating conditions has not generally been a criterion for inclusion in state vaccine high-priority groups.<sup>7</sup> As states begin to open vaccine availability to most adults regardless of age and underlying medical conditions, and as more people with epilepsy are encouraged to take the vaccine, epilepsy care providers are likely to encounter questions from patients, families, and caregivers. AES urges providers to be proactive in counselling people with epilepsy, families, and caregivers regarding the importance of COVID-19 vaccination, what to expect after receiving the vaccine, and appropriate individualized considerations and preparation.

Provider considerations for individual patient counseling may include: antiseizure medications (ASMs), other medications, and any concomitant comorbidities or underlying disease conditions that may impact immune response and COVID-19-related risks; consultation with primary care providers for people with epilepsy receiving immunosuppressive therapy; potential drug interactions between ASMs and COVID-19 therapies; and preparing people with epilepsy for whom fever is a known seizure trigger.<sup>6,8,9</sup> Such preparations may include:

- Instruct patients, families, and caregivers on appropriate use, choice, and timing of analgesia for fever or other common side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine that are compatible with optimal effectiveness of the vaccine.<sup>10</sup>
- Ensure that families and caregivers have an appropriate seizure rescue medications plan and that medications are available in case of fever-induced breakthrough seizures.<sup>8,11</sup>
- Help patients, families, and caregivers understand how to balance concerns about vaccine-induced fever against the relatively greater potential risks of active COVID-19 infection.

AES encourages epilepsy care providers to address vaccine hesitations expressed by patients, families, and caregivers. Excellent resources are available from AES, CDC, American Medical Association, and

other sources, as referenced in this statement, to help providers stay up to date with the latest COVID-19 vaccine information and communicate effectively with patients about the vaccine.<sup>1-4,12-21</sup>

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