

**Q What about vaccinations and arthritis?**

**A** Some types of arthritis and their treatments can affect the immune system and lead to an increased risk of infection. This can be due to the condition itself or its treatment, such as (DMARDs) or steroids. There are vaccinations routinely recommended such as influenza and pneumococcal vaccine. However, if an individual is immunosuppressed they should not have live vaccines.

If an individual is taking rituximab, a biological therapy used for treating rheumatoid arthritis and certain types of connective tissue disease, you should try to have the flu vaccination either before or six months after an infusion as rituximab affects the cells which produce antibodies for about six months after infusion. If the flu vaccine is given within six months of taking rituximab, you may respond less well to the vaccination and so you may not be fully protected against flu.

The small dose of a live organism in live vaccines may be enough to cause symptoms of the disease in people who are immunosuppressed. For this reason, live vaccines aren't recommended if individuals are on certain DMARDs or biological therapies.

**As biological therapies, cyclophosphamide and methotrexate aren't usually prescribed by the patient's GP, and, as such, the medication may not appear on the records you hold for these patients, it's always worth speaking with individuals about their drug treatments before you administer vaccination.**

Normally a live vaccine would only be given if immunosuppressive drugs are stopped at least three months before the vaccination. Sometimes live vaccines will be given before immunosuppressive drugs are started. Immunosuppressive drugs shouldn't be started for at least two weeks, preferably four weeks, after you've been given a live vaccine.

## Travel vaccination and information resources

**Q Where can I get information on travel vaccines and information resources?**

**A** [TRAVAX](#) is funded by the Scottish Government Health Department and is provided free to those using the service for NHS purposes in Scotland. It is a very useful resource for Up-to-date travel health information for health care professionals.

[Fitfortravel](#) is a public access website provided by the NHS (Scotland). It provides general travel health advice and disease prevention information for people travelling abroad from the UK.

For more info contact: **Travel Health General Enquiries: Health Protection Scotland.**

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