Children and the COVID-19 Vaccine

Updated July 30, 2021

This document is intended to provide parents and caregivers with a series of FAQs regarding COVID-19 vaccines for children. This information is based on currently available scientific evidence, reports, emergency use authorization details, and expert opinion, and is subject to change as information evolves. This document is accurate as of July 30, 2021 and will be frequently updated as new evidence and information about COVID-19 vaccines becomes available.

Is my child eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

Currently children age 12 and up are eligible for vaccination against COVID-19. As of July 2021, those ages 12-17 can receive the two-dose Pfizer vaccine. Trials are underway for younger children, with the results of trials for ages 5-11 from Pfizer expected early fall 2021 and from Moderna several months later. Results and approval for younger children will follow this initial group.

Aren’t children at low risk of contracting COVID-19 or becoming sick from it? Why should I vaccinate my child given this lower risk?

Though fewer children have been sick from COVID-19 compared to adults, children can be infected, get sick, and spread the virus to others. While most children have mild symptoms, they can become extremely ill, resulting in hospitalization and death. During the spring and summer of 2021, kids have made up a higher portion of COVID-19 case counts than ever before. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, during the week of July 22, 2021, children accounted for 16.8% of all reported weekly cases. More than 4.1 million children in the U.S. have tested positive for COVID-19, with nearly 500 deaths; Black, Latino, and Native American children have been hardest hit. This is not only affecting children and their families, but is also amplifying the pandemic.

Vaccination for eligible children is safe and effective at preventing them from becoming severely ill from COVID-19. The benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks of vaccination. More than 189 million people, including nearly 8 million children ages 12-17, have already been vaccinated in the U.S. Vaccination not only safeguards your child’s health, but it also protects friends, siblings, grandparents, and others in your community who may be elderly, immunocompromised, or too young to become vaccinated. Children contribute significantly to population immunity; a high percentage of our country’s population must be vaccinated to stop the spread of the virus, especially as the highly transmissible Delta variant spreads. We need them to become vaccinated to protect themselves and us all and to definitively move on from this pandemic.

Beyond the health benefits of vaccination are the social and developmental benefits. Children have suffered greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic, often missing in-person educational and recreational opportunities that offer stimulation, socialization, and support. Vaccination will allow children to return safely to activities that spur mental, physical, and intellectual growth, without fear they will become sick or pass the virus on to others in their families or communities. The longer the virus is able to travel through our communities, the greater the chance activities (sports, camps, school, etc.) will be shut down again, isolating children and taxing families.

Is it safe for my child to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

Medical and public health experts trust the very serious and thorough FDA trial and approval process for the vaccines, as well as the public health regulatory system that constantly monitors ongoing vaccine safety and effectiveness. Trials for children under 12 are well underway and have expanded to include more children and acquire more data on safety and effectiveness against the virus—ensuring experts know as much as possible. Speak to your pediatrician to learn more.

The ideas presented in this document reflect the latest public health thinking and scientific evidence as of July 2021. You are advised that the COVID-19 vaccine landscape remains highly fluid, and it is your responsibility to ensure that decisions are made based on the most up-to-date information available. Partners in Health does not provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment in the United States. Always seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions regarding a medical condition. The information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images and other material contained in this document, are intended for informational purposes only.
**What are the main risks of COVID-19 vaccination for my child? I hear about heart issues?**

Nearly 8 million children ages 12-17 have been fully vaccinated in the U.S. as of mid-July, safely and with very few reports of major side effects. Given the biological mechanism of the mRNA vaccines, experts do not anticipate any long-term issues with the vaccinations and encourage vaccination to protect against the high risk from COVID-19. The CDC, FDA, public health and medical experts are constantly monitoring the safety of the vaccines.

Heart issues including myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the lining outside the heart) after COVID-19 vaccination are extremely rare. As of July 19, 2021, the CDC and FDA had confirmed 674 cases of myocarditis or pericarditis among people ages 30 and younger who received the COVID-19 vaccine. Most cases have been reported after mRNA COVID-19 vaccination (Pfizer or Moderna), particularly in male adolescents (16+) and young adults. Most cases are mild and recover with little to no medical treatment. The CDC and the FDA continue to monitor these instances and constantly evaluate for safety.

Speak with your pediatrician to address any concerns over vaccine safety.

**What are other side effects of the vaccine to my child?**

Side effects among children who have received the vaccine are similar to those experienced by adults. This can include pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache, chills, muscle pain, fever, and joint pain. These side effects are usually mild and last 1-3 days. In general, kids have a heightened immune response so may have slightly stronger side effects than adults.

**Does the vaccine work? Is there an issue with the Delta variant? I heard about breakthrough cases?**

Every time a virus is passed on to another person mutations can occur. Any of these mutations may make the virus more transmissible and/or deadly. As long as transmission is allowed to occur (e.g. within under vaccinated communities) there is potential for new variants to emerge. The Delta variant is more infectious than previous ones, meaning that it spreads more easily through our communities. It is now causing the vast majority of COVID-19 cases in the U.S. This means that more people will be infected, especially those who are not yet vaccinated. Vaccination can largely prevent infection and transmission, thereby limiting the ability of the virus to mutate uncontrollably.

COVID-19 vaccines are primarily intended to lower the risk of severe illness and death from the virus, which they continue to do extremely well. No vaccine is perfect, and breakthrough cases are expected; the Delta variant is causing more breakthrough cases than other versions of the virus. However, it is encouraging to see that the vast majority of these cases are either asymptomatic or mild. If your eligible child is not vaccinated, he/she continues to be at risk of serious illness or death. While about half of Americans are unvaccinated, they currently make up at least 97% of hospitalizations and deaths.

**Do I need to pay for my child to become vaccinated?**

No! All vaccines are provided through the U.S. government and will be free of charge to all individuals, including those without insurance. For those who have insurance, your information may be collected so the vaccine provider can bill the insurance company for administrative costs, but there will be no out-of-pocket cost to the individual.

**Where can I get my child vaccinated?**

If your child is eligible for vaccination (12+), they will be able to get their vaccine at a variety of locations, including your pediatrician’s office. In some places, your child may have access to the vaccine at school-based clinics, pharmacies, or other types of sites. You can search online for locations in your area here: [https://www.vaccines.gov/search/](https://www.vaccines.gov/search/). Refer to your local health department or pediatrician for more details, as there may be opportunities not listed on this website.

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