

Why Children Need the COVID-19 Vaccine

By Valerie Borum Smith, MD, MPH, FAAP

There is good news for parents. Children 12 years and older can now get the COVID-19 vaccine. And it couldn't come at a better time. Children are less likely to develop severe illness from COVID-19. But they are still at risk.

Families deserve the chance to get back to an active life without constant worries. The vaccine is the best shot at a normal life.

Which COVID-19 vaccines can children get?

Adults have several options for a vaccine. Pfizer-BioNTech is currently the only option available for children 12 and older. Providers give this vaccine in two doses. The child gets the two doses 21 days apart. Two weeks after getting the vaccines kids have maximum protection.

Can children get the virus from the vaccine?

No. The vaccine does not contain the live virus, so your child cannot get COVID from the vaccine.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for children?

Yes. The vaccine developers used science that has been around for decades. It got emergency authorization from the Food and Drug Administration. The developers tested the Pfizer vaccine for safety in children 12 and older. They also tested the effectiveness. It was tested for adults this way too. Since it's been available for children under 17, millions of kids got the vaccine.*

Why are pediatricians recommending children get the vaccine?

Our role as pediatricians is to keep patients safe and healthy. We want them to get back to normal activities. Parents ask me if they should get their children vaccinated for COVID-19. I recommend they do. I would never recommend something I wouldn't recommend for my own child, a family member, or a loved one.

Another reason for getting the vaccine is children can spread the virus to others. There could be family, friends, teachers, classmates, or others who have a health condition. A health condition that puts them at greater risk of getting COVID-19.

These folks could be facing serious consequences if they get COVID-19. The vaccine helps prevent the spread to everyone around them.

Who Recommends the COVID-19 Vaccine for Eligible Children and Teens?

Pediatricians, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) all recommend that eligible children and teens get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Millions of children in the United States tested positive for the virus. And according to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), hundreds died because of COVID-19.

When and how was the vaccine tested?

The Pfizer study with children began in March 2021. The study enrolled 2,260 participants ages 12 to 15. Of those children, 1,131 received the vaccine (two shots, given three weeks apart.) 1,129 received saline placebo shots. The study found the vaccine worked even better for children than it did for adults. No children in the vaccine group got sick with COVID-19, while 18 children in the placebo group became ill.

Moderna recently released the results of its test of the vaccine in 3,732 people ages 12 to 17. Two-thirds got two vaccine doses. There were no cases of symptomatic COVID-19 in fully vaccinated adolescents. More than 160 million people have been fully vaccinated. This includes more than seven million 12 to 17-year-olds. The CDC continues to monitor for side effects.

Fun Fact:

I have three teenagers, and we were in line the first Saturday we could get them vaccinated. The fact that they are fully vaccinated really does give me great comfort. And allowed us to have a summer filled with vacation, friends, and family.

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FAQ

Did they rush the testing to get the vaccine approved quickly?

No. Researchers have been studying and working with mRNA vaccines for decades. This includes studies for vaccines for the flu, Zika, and rabies. All that work made it possible for scientists to create the COVID-19 vaccine. Researchers gathered information about the COVID virus when it was available. They then began designing the specific mRNA instructions. Instructions effective against the virus.

Does the vaccine change your DNA (genetic material)?

No. The COVID mRNA vaccine does not affect or interact with DNA in any way. It never enters the nucleus of the cell. This is where the DNA is.

What information is available about the long-term effects of the vaccine?

The long-term effects are not known for children or adults at this time. The long-term effects of getting COVID are not known either. Research does show some children who recovered from a mild case of COVID may have long-term inflammation in the heart and lungs.

What are the short-term side effects in children who have gotten the vaccine?

Some children have experienced pain at the injection site, fever, chills, tiredness, headache, joint and muscle pain. These typically last one to three days. In general, the risks from getting COVID-19 are much greater than the risks of getting the vaccine.

Should my child get the vaccine if they have allergies?

Does your child have a history of severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in the vaccine? If so, they should not get the vaccine. It's important to talk to your pediatrician about the vaccine. This is especially true if your child has a history of allergies.

Where can I get my child vaccinated?

You can get vaccines at pediatrician offices and pharmacies. Be sure to check in advance if you need an appointment or if walk-in options are available. You can also visit covidvaccine.texas.gov or call **1-833-832-7067** to find a vaccine near you.

How much does it cost, and do I need insurance?

The vaccine is free for everyone. You and your child do not need insurance to get a COVID vaccination.

When will younger children be able to get the vaccine?

We expect approval for children five to 11 this winter. Children even younger will likely be able to get the vaccine in early 2022. As we see more contagious variants of COVID-19, like the Delta variant, we will likely see more unvaccinated people get ill.

This unfortunately includes young children. Thankfully most young children recover well from COVID-19. There are some that develop life-threatening complications such as multisystem inflammatory syndrome. They can also spread COVID-19 to more vulnerable people.

Can my child get the COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines at the same time?

Yes, children can get the COVID vaccine with other childhood immunizations. If your child is behind on HPV, meningococcal, and other recommended vaccines, now is a good time to catch up. They can get all the necessary vaccines with the COVID shot.

How should I make the best decision for my family on the getting the vaccine?

Talk to your child's pediatrician or health care provider. They will know your child's medical history. Your pediatrician can recommend vaccines based on your child and family situation.

*CDC Data, 8/2/21

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