

Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for kids 5 and up: What doctors must know

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What's the news: Children 5–11 years old are now eligible to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) accepted the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices to recommend the use of the vaccine for the estimated 28 million 5–11-year-olds in the U.S. This comes after the Food and Drug Administration granted emergency use authorization (EUA) of the vaccine for children on Friday, based on the determination that the benefits of COVID-19 vaccination outweigh risks in this population.

The vaccine will be distributed in smaller dosing and with smaller needles to make it easier for physicians and pharmacists to administer. It is one-third the adolescent and adult dose and will be given in two doses, 21 days apart. With the lower dose, the side effects may be minimized, compared to adolescents and young adults. Vaccination was nearly 91% effective in preventing COVID-19 among children 5–11 years old.

As with adults, the vaccine side effects were mild and self-limiting for children with the most common being a sore arm. Other side effects reported were redness and swelling, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills, fever, swollen lymph nodes, nausea and decreased appetite. Side effects typically occurred within two days after vaccination with most diminishing within two days. Although the clinical trial for children 5–11 years old reported no cases of myocarditis or pericarditis, the study was not powered to assess the risk. People—especially males under the age of 30—should be made aware of the rare possibility of myocarditis or pericarditis following receipt of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccines for children aged 5–11 will be available at thousands of physician offices, pharmacies, federally qualified health centers and more.

Learn how the COVID-19 vaccine rollout for children asks doctors to play bigger role.

Why it's important: The rapid rise and spread of the Delta variant resulted in a surge of COVID-19 cases among children throughout the summer. While children have been less affected by COVID-19 compared with adults, they can still get sick and spread SARS-CoV-2 to others. According to the CDC, there have been more than 1.9 million COVID-19 cases, more than 8,300 COVID-associated hospitalizations, and at least 94 COVID-19-associated deaths in children aged 5–11 years in the United States.

Some children may even develop severe illness, especially if they have underlying medical conditions. Although rare, some children who were infected with SARS-CoV-2 may later develop multisystem inflammatory syndrome and experience long-term complications—or long COVID—which can linger for months.

ACIP's action on the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children "is a critical step toward protecting this population from COVID-19 infections and ensuring widespread vaccination in the United States," said AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, MD. "We urge all parents to get their children vaccinated as soon as they are eligible."

"We are hopeful that millions of children will receive the vaccine in the coming weeks and months—significantly reducing their risk of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death, and bringing the end of the pandemic closer," said Dr. Harmon.

Noting the stark racial and ethnic inequities in hospitalization rates, Dr. Harmon added that "ensuring equitable access to the pediatric vaccine will be critical, including through school-located clinics."

Vaccination—along with wearing a mask, physical distancing and following other preventive measures—can protect children from COVID-19. Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 can also help to reduce disruptions to in-person learning and activities by helping curb community transmission.

Discover why these two physicians signed up their son for a COVID-19 vaccine trial.

Learn more: "While there is overwhelming scientific evidence showing the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, we know many parents and families still have questions," said Dr. Harmon. "We encourage parents to speak with their child's physician and review trusted resources, such as [getvaccineanswers.org](https://www.getvaccineanswers.org), to get the information they need to make an informed decision."

“Physicians are a trusted source of medical information and advice for parents,” he said. “We know that many physicians have already signed up as COVID-19 vaccine providers, and we urge those who have not yet signed up to reach out to their state or local immunization program to help ensure a smooth and quick rollout of the vaccine to all children.”

Read more from Dr. Harmon on seizing the opportunity to vaccinate younger kids against COVID-19.

The AMA recognizes the critical importance of scientific integrity, transparency and public trust as we fight to contain the global spread of COVID-19 and plan for the authorization, distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines. Stay up to date with the AMA on COVID-19 vaccine development.