

Why parents should get kids under 5 vaccinated against COVID-19

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Young children have been the only major group of Americans left unprotected against COVID-19 with no authorized vaccines available for them. And with COVID-19 cases in young children surging during the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant and subvariant waves, parents have been left worrying about when their kids would be eligible for this vital form of protection.

But the wait is over and children 6 months of age and older in the U.S. are now eligible to receive Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines. Having two vaccines for this pediatric population provides a choice for parents who are eager to get their children vaccinated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) accepted the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices to recommend the use of the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines for nearly 20 million children who are younger than 5. This comes after the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee unanimously voted to recommend emergency use authorization (EUA) of the vaccines for children on June 15, based on the determination that the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccines outweighed the risks in this population. The FDA issued EUAs for both of these vaccines for the youngest kids on June 17.

"To unanimously recommend use of both the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines for children as young as six months of age is a vital step in protecting many more children from COVID-19," said Jack Resneck Jr., MD, president of the AMA. "Many parents across the U.S. have anxiously awaited a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine for their children—having foregone normal daily activities for the past several years to protect their youngest children from the virus.

Parents will breathe a sigh of relief knowing these vaccines will very soon be available," Dr. Resneck added.

Last week, administration officials started accepting state and local orders for COVID-19 vaccines. They expected to have 5 million doses each of Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines available June 21 for infants and young children. Millions more were set to be available soon thereafter.

When physicians are counseling parents with infants, toddlers or preschoolers about Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines for their children, there are three major reasons to vaccinate that doctors should review.

Both vaccines are safe and effective

The Moderna vaccine primary series for children 6 months through 5 years old is administered in two 25-microgram doses given four to eight weeks apart. The shots were about 40–50% effective at preventing milder Omicron SARS-CoV-2 infections in young children. Acknowledging the lower efficacy, Moderna expects children in this age group to be offered a booster dose at some point in time.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine primary series for children 6 months to 4 years old is administered in three 3-microgram doses. The first and second doses are separated by three to eight weeks and the second and third doses are separated by at least eight weeks. Three doses of the Pfizer vaccine were shown to be 80% effective in preventing symptomatic COVID-19.

Both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines were shown to have similar side effects, which included pain at the injection site, irritability, drowsiness and fever.

“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. Resneck. “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.

“We also encourage the use of [v-safe](#), a smartphone-based tool that helps the CDC monitor COVID-19 vaccine safety,” he added.

Learn what doctors wish parents knew about kids' COVID-19 vaccine safety.

Vaccination prevents hospitalization

While younger children are typically spared the worst effects of COVID-19, severe cases and deaths can still occur. But rates of hospitalization are slowly increasing for young children 6 months to 4 years

old.

Due to the dominance of the Omicron variant, which began in late December, hospitalization rates of infants and children under 5 are five times the rate of the previous peak seen with the COVID-19 Delta variant, according to the CDC. This is a major reason why experts have emphasized the ongoing importance and need to protect the youngest children.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, among children in the U.S. aged 6 months to 4 years, there have been more than 2 million cases of COVID-19, more than 20,000 hospitalizations, and more than 200 deaths,” said Dr. Resneck. “We urge parents to get their children vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as they are eligible.”?

“It is imperative that all parents in all jurisdictions have access to the vaccine for infants and children and we are hopeful that millions more children will receive the vaccine in the coming weeks and months—reducing their risk of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death,” he said.

Discover striking CDC data to share with COVID-19 vaccine-hesitant parents.

Benefits go beyond prevention

Getting kids vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2 can also reduce their odds of developing further complications such as long COVID and multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children.

Authorization of Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines for younger children also offers some freedom to families who have practiced a higher degree of physical distancing until their youngest members could be vaccinated. But babies younger than 6 months will not be expected to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Instead, vaccination during pregnancy is highly recommended because it can pass on protection that lasts for the first six months of the baby’s life.

To stay informed on the latest COVID-19 news on vaccines, treatments and guidance, visit the?AMA COVID-19 resource center for physicians.

The AMA has also developed frequently-asked-questions documents on COVID-19 vaccination covering safety, allocation and distribution, administration and more. There are two FAQs, one designed to answer?patients’?questions?(PDF), and another to address?physicians’?COVID-19 vaccine questions?(PDF).