

Important Update on Vaccines for Children

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Most health experts expect another wave of COVID-19 in the fall, but there is good news! Last week, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam announced that Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine has been approved as a booster for children between the ages of 5 and 11!*

Currently, this is the first vaccine approved as a COVID-19 booster approved for children in this age group.* Moderna's paediatric vaccine is only authorized to be used as the first and second dose.*

If your child is eligible, getting their third dose will increase their immune response just in time for the back-to-school season!

This week's article will answer some frequently asked questions for parents and provide resources to help increase you and your child's vaccine confidence.

What is this vaccine?

The booster is 10 micrograms of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.*

Who should get it?

According to NACI, the Pfizer-BioNTech booster dose should be offered to children who are at risk of more severe outcomes from the virus, such as children with underlying medical conditions and children who are immunocompromised.*

What are the benefits of vaccinating my child(ren) at all?

Even if your child(ren) has had COVID-19 before, they can get it more than once.* Getting vaccinated provides longer protection against a COVID-19 infection compared to the natural immunity period after infection.* Vaccines lower the risk of getting sick from COVID-19.*

The approved vaccines are safe and effective, including for children with a health condition, such as allergies, asthma, diabetes or a weak immune system.* COVID-19 is a leading cause of hospitalization and death in young children, sometimes leading to Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C).* MIS-C is rare, but very serious.* It causes inflammation of the heart, lungs, kidney, brain, skin, eyes, and stomach.*

Paediatric vaccines also provide protection from Long COVID, even if a child catches COVID-19 after they were vaccinated.* We are still learning about the health effects of

COVID-19 infections.* For now, we know that Long COVID in children can involve symptoms, such as coughing and tiredness, lasting for months.*

Also, vaccines protect the friends, family, and community members who your child(ren) regularly sees at places such as daycare, social gatherings, school, and more.*

What are the side effects and risks of the vaccine?

Side effects in children are similar to the symptoms in youth and adults.* They are usually mild and last one to three days.* Side effects usually mean that the vaccine is working and strengthening the body's immune response.*

Common side effects include:

- redness, swelling or pain where the vaccine was given
- headache
- feeling tired
- joint pain and/or muscle aches
- chills and/or fever
- nausea and/or vomiting.*

You should seek medical attention if your child has a fever over 40°C or side effects that last more than three days after vaccination.*

What about myocarditis and pericarditis?

Myocarditis and pericarditis are types of heart inflammation that can occur after a COVID-19 infection, and they can be serious.* In the clinical trial for the paediatric Moderna vaccine, zero cases of myocarditis or pericarditis were reported in vaccinated children between the ages of 6 months and under 6 years of age.*

You should seek medical attention if your child develops chest pain, shortness of breath, or a racing heart a few weeks after vaccination.*

Vaccination is still recommended as the benefits are greater than the risks.*

My child has allergies. Are these vaccines safe?

These vaccines are safe for children with food, medication or environmental allergies.* The Moderna paediatric vaccine contains lipids (fats), salts, sugars and buffers.* They do not contain eggs, gelatin (pork), gluten, latex, preservatives, antibiotics, or aluminum.*

Allergic reactions, including serious reactions, are rare.* Allergic reactions can be treated and are usually temporary.* Get medical help if your child has trouble breathing or develops hives or swelling in the face and throat.* Speak with a health care provider if your child is allergic to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or tromethamine (Tris).*

My child(ren) has special needs and/or a disability. Is there a special clinic for them?

If they are older than six months and younger than five years, then yes!

SickKids Hospital is hosting weekly COVID-19 vaccine clinics for any infant/child in this age group who requires accommodations due to medical complexity, developmental disorder, mobility challenges, communication, behavioural and other specialized needs (including significant fear of needles).

This clinic will happen each Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. More dates and times are expected to become available soon.

It's by appointment only. To make an appointment, you need to be referred through your doctor. For any questions regarding patient referrals, contact mobile.vaccination@sickkids.ca.

I'm still concerned. Can I talk to someone about this?

Yes, you can!

There are a few ways that you can speak with a healthcare professional about the vaccine, your child's health conditions, and more!

1. You can speak to your family healthcare provider, such as your family doctor.*
2. If you don't have one, you can call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 to speak to a health specialist.*
3. Another option is to visit [COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service](#) to book a confidential phone appointment with a SickKids Registered Nurse.*

You can always call them to discuss your child(ren)'s health, but you are especially recommended to call them if your child(ren):

- takes medication(s) that weaken their immune systems. The timing of the vaccination and medication(s) may need to be considered.
- had an allergic reaction four hours after getting their first COVID-19 vaccine dose.
- has severe allergies to any of the vaccine ingredients.
- had Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C).

How long should children wait in between doses?

For the first and second doses of Moderna's paediatric vaccine, NACI recommends waiting 8 weeks in between doses.* It's also safe to receive the Moderna vaccine 4 weeks apart, but waiting longer may give stronger long-term protection.*

For the Pfizer paediatric booster, the recommended time frame is six months after the child's second dose.*

In terms of other vaccines, if possible, NACI recommends that children get their COVID-19 vaccines at least 14 days before or 14 days after other vaccines.* This is so that their

healthcare provider can correctly identify the cause of any side effects.* For instance, if your child gets the flu shot and COVID-19 vaccine at the same time and start to have a reaction, it will be difficult to know which vaccine caused that reaction.

However, if spacing out vaccines is difficult or will create delays, young children can get COVID-19 vaccines at the same time as other vaccines.*

How soon after a COVID-19 infection should young children be vaccinated?

Children can be vaccinated once they feel better and their isolation period ends.* NACI recommends that most children wait 8 weeks after a COVID-19 infection to get a COVID-19 vaccine.* The 8 weeks should be counted from the day symptoms start or the day of the first positive test.* Waiting may give children better protection in the long-term.* Children with multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C) should wait at least 90 days to be vaccinated.*

My child(ren) doesn't like needles. How can I make the vaccination experience easier for them?

Toronto Public Health made a great resource on this topic! Click [here](#) to check it out!

It recommends talking to your child about the vaccine appointment in advance. Create a plan together. Have your child choose a toy, book, or electronic device to distract or comfort them. Tell them that they may feel a “poke” or “pinch” for a few seconds. Let them choose if they want to watch it happen. Sometimes looking away makes them feel better, but some children feel better if they watch. You can also talk to your doctor or pharmacist in advance about numbing creams or patches.

During the vaccination, cuddle them while they sit up. Check out the resource above for some illustrations of what that could look like. When your child is getting vaccinated, they will feel calmer if you take deep breaths and stay calm. Also, remember to distract your child with the toy, book, or electronic device that you chose together.

When they're done, praise and reward them! Positive reinforcement can work in kids of all ages. Talk to your doctor about giving your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever, aches, or pain after the needle.

Final Thoughts

Keeping your child(ren)'s vaccination status up-to-date with the newly approved booster will give them more protection against COVID-19 and reduce the spread of the virus in the community!

This article is meant for parents to feel more confident about vaccinating their child(ren). But if your child(ren) isn't feeling sure about it, there is a great resource to answer their questions and increase their confidence in these vaccines called Max the Vax.

Max the Vax is run by a team of Canadian physicians, scientists, and health care providers to share trusted, evidence-based content about COVID-19 and vaccines.* It's updated regularly to make sure it has the best, most accurate, up-to-date information.*

It has information and resources for both children and caregivers of children. The frequently asked questions pages for children and caregivers are available in English, French, Punjabi, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese. Click [here](#) to go to Max the Vax!

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local

health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675