

# COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Youth

Vaccines are safe, effective and the best way to protect your child and family from COVID-19 and its variants. While millions of people across Ontario have received their COVID-19 vaccine, we know you may have questions about vaccines for children (aged five to 11) and youth (aged 12-17). Here are answers to some of the most commonly asked questions.



## 1. Why should my child get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccinating children and youth will provide them with a strong level of protection against COVID-19 and its variants, keep schools safer and open, and stop the spread of the virus. This will help protect other family members too, such as those under five years old who can't get vaccinated yet, or more vulnerable elderly individuals.

## 2. How long should I wait between my child's first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Children aged five to 11 will receive the paediatric Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, and youth aged 12 to 17 will receive the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. To provide the strongest possible protection, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends waiting eight weeks between the first and second dose. This is based on evidence in adults that suggest longer intervals between doses results in a stronger immune response and higher vaccine effectiveness that is expected to last longer.

## 3. Has the COVID-19 vaccine been thoroughly tested for children and youth? How do I know it's safe?

Health Canada has one of the most rigorous scientific review systems in the world and only approves a vaccine if it is safe, works, and meets the highest manufacturing and quality standards. After a thorough and independent scientific review of the evidence, Health Canada determined that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective at providing a strong immune response against COVID-19 in children and youth.

For children aged five to 11, Health Canada has authorized a two-dose series of the paediatric Pfizer vaccine, which is a distinct formulation at a lower dose designed specifically for the paediatric population, than the two-dose regimen authorized for people ages 12 and older.

To date, millions of children aged five to 11 have now received the paediatric Pfizer vaccine in the United States, with no concerning safety signal identified to date.

#### **4. Aren't COVID-19 symptoms milder for children and youth?**

While children and youth who get infected with COVID-19 typically experience mild symptoms, some can get very sick, resulting in hospitalization, ICU admission or even death.

Others can experience serious and longer-lasting symptoms (i.e. long COVID-19, post-acute COVID-19 syndrome).

The COVID-19 vaccine will help your child fight off the virus more easily if they are infected and make their symptoms milder. Not only will the vaccine protect children and youth from the harmful impact of COVID-19, it will also lower the risk of transmission to others and allow them to continue fostering their mental health and well-being through in-person learning, extracurricular activities and social interactions with family, friends and peers.

#### **5. Will children aged five to 11 receive the same dosage of the COVID-19 vaccine as other age groups?**

No. Children aged five to 11 will receive the paediatric Pfizer vaccine, which is a distinct formulation at a lower dose of one-third the amount given to individuals aged 12 and older, in a two-dose series at a recommended interval of eight weeks.

#### **6. Have the long-term side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine for children been determined?**

The benefits of getting vaccinated and being protected against COVID-19 far outweigh the risks of any side effects from the vaccine. COVID-19 infection may cause longer-lasting

symptoms and health problems for some people, including children, which is why it's important to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

#### **7. How common is myocarditis and/or pericarditis in youth?**

A very small number of cases of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and/or pericarditis (inflammation of lining outside the heart) following vaccination have been reported. Most cases occurred in young adult males between 18 and 30 years of age after the second dose of vaccine, and most had mild illness and recovered quickly.

Myocarditis/pericarditis following COVID-19 mRNA vaccines remains a rare adverse event following immunization (AEFI), which is defined by the Canadian Immunization Guide as occurring at frequency of 0.01 per cent to less than 0.1 per cent. Myocarditis and pericarditis are more likely to occur after a COVID-19 infection than after COVID-19 vaccines.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) continues to recommend vaccination with mRNA COVID-19 vaccines for all individuals aged five and older since the vaccines are highly effective at preventing symptomatic infection and severe outcomes (i.e., hospitalization, death) from COVID-19. NACI recommends that children and youth wait eight weeks between the first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. This interval may be associated with a lower risk of myocarditis and/or pericarditis.

## **8. What will the vaccination experience be like for my child?**

A number of locations offering the COVID-19 vaccine for children aged five to 11 will be customized to ensure a child-friendly environment. This includes providing sensory-friendly clinic options such as reduced noise and reduced bright lights, and setting up clinics to offer privacy like cubicles or family pods so you can be with your child when they receive the vaccine.

In addition, all public health units will offer select clinics at or near schools to facilitate access and provide another safe environment to administer the vaccine to this age group. Clinics will be offered primarily after school hours (e.g. evenings and weekends) to support convenient and welcoming options for children and families.

Parents or substitute decision makers of children aged five to 11 will, for the most part, have to provide consent on behalf of your child at the time of the appointment or fill out a paper consent form for your child.

## **9. Will my child experience side effects or reactions?**

Like any vaccination, your child may experience mild side effects and reactions that will subside anywhere from a few hours to a few days after vaccination. These side effects are part of their body's efforts to build immunity to COVID-19 following vaccination. Common side effects may include redness and swelling on the arm where the vaccine was given, tiredness, muscle soreness, headache or mild fever.

If your child develops side effects that are worrying you or do not seem to be going away after a few days, please contact a health care provider.

## **10. What should my child do if they experience side effects after getting the vaccine?**

Applying a cool, damp cloth where the vaccine was given may help with soreness and swelling. If needed, speak to your doctor about over-the-counter pain or fever medication, which may help with side effects such as headache, muscle pain and fever. It is generally not recommended to take medication before vaccination to try to prevent side effects.

## **11. Will the COVID-19 vaccine impact my child's fertility?**

COVID-19 vaccines do not cause male or female infertility and there is no evidence to suggest that they will cause future infertility.

## **12. Won't the COVID-19 vaccine put my child at risk for an allergic reaction?**

Serious allergic reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine are very rare and can be treated. To be safe, everyone who gets vaccinated is monitored for at least 15 minutes in case an allergic reaction occurs.

If you think your child might be having a severe allergic reaction after leaving the vaccination site, go to the nearest emergency department or call 911. Signs of an allergic reaction could include having trouble breathing, developing hives or swelling in the face and throat.

If your child has a history of allergic reactions to vaccines or medication, please discuss this with your child's doctor prior to vaccination.

### **13. Will children receive proof that they are vaccinated?**

Yes. Vaccine certificates with QR codes will be available for children aged five to 11 on the COVID-19 vaccination portal as a record of their vaccination.

However, there are no requirements for children aged five to 11 to show proof of vaccination in Ontario. There may be different requirements in other jurisdictions.

### **14. Where can I get more information?**

Visit [Ontario.ca/covidvaccinekids](https://ontario.ca/covidvaccinekids) to learn more about COVID-19 vaccines for children and youth.

You can also contact the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre to speak to an experienced agent or health specialist at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY for people who are deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired: 1-866-797-0007), available in more than 300 languages, seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

In addition, you can contact the SickKids COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service to book a confidential phone appointment with a SickKids paediatric Registered Nurse through [sickkids.ca/vaccineconsult](https://sickkids.ca/vaccineconsult), or call 1-888-304-6558. This service is available in multiple languages using over-the-phone language interpretation.