

COVID-19 Vaccine for Children and Youth Ages 12+

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Developed by the Children's COVID-19 Vaccine Table
Supported by the Children's Health Coalition

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Health Canada has authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 12 and up. Clinical studies showed that this vaccine is safe and effective for this age group. Ontario is preparing to begin rolling out vaccination for those aged 12 and up across the province by the end of May. This means children 12 and up should be able to receive the first dose of the vaccine before the end of the current school year.

Why should children and youth be vaccinated for COVID-19?

While fewer children compared to adults have gotten sick from COVID-19, they have been impacted in many other ways. Children in Ontario have had to attend school remotely, miss out on extra-curricular activities, and spend extended amounts of time away from their friends and peers. This has a big impact on children's mental health. Vaccinating all who are eligible, including children, will help to reduce the number of cases of COVID-19 in our community and allow kids to get to participating in activities they enjoy.

Children who get infected with COVID-19 typically experience mild symptoms. However, some kids can get very sick requiring hospitalization. Children can also get a serious medical condition called "Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children." Others can experience more serious, longer-lasting symptoms that can affect their health and well-being. In very rare cases, the virus can also cause death in children.

Like adults, children also can transmit the virus to others if they are infected, even if they don't feel sick.

Vaccinating children can also help to protect the health of the broader community. Each time someone is infected with COVID-19, it provides a chance for the virus to mutate and create a variant. New variants are modified versions of the original virus and can be more dangerous or resistant to the available vaccines and treatments. This is why it is really important to prevent COVID-19 infections. The sooner we can stop the virus from spreading, the less likely it will be able to mutate into a new variant. COVID-19 vaccination is voluntary for anyone in Ontario.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for youth 12 to 17 years of age?

Yes. Health Canada has authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for youth ages 12 to 17. The vaccine is given in two doses. It is the same vaccine used in adults. As part of their rigorous scientific review process, they have determined that this vaccine:

- ✓ is safe in youth with no serious side effects;
- ✓ works well in youth, providing a strong immune response and;
- ✓ the vaccine is of high quality.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has also been authorized in the United States for use in the 12 to 17 year old age group and close to 3 million doses have already been given to those aged 12 to 17. No serious side effects have been identified in this age group.

Health Canada oversight of COVID-19 vaccines does not stop at approval. Monitoring of vaccine safety and effectiveness will continue into the future.

How well does the vaccine work in youth?

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has been demonstrated to be highly effective at protecting against COVID-19 for individuals 12 and over. The Pfizer-BioNTech clinical trial studied 2,260 youth aged 12 to 15 years old in the United States. In the trial, there were 18 cases of COVID-19 in the group that did not get the vaccine (the "placebo" group) compared to no cases in the vaccinated group. This means the vaccine was 100% effective in the trial.

When you are given the vaccine, you produce antibodies that protect you in case you are exposed to the virus. The antibody response in the 12 to 15 year olds who were vaccinated was very strong one month after receiving the second dose. Youth can often have very good immune response following vaccination, resulting in strong protection.

Youth 16 years of age and older were included in the earlier clinical trials with adults. The vaccine has been licensed for 16 years and older since December 2020. The vaccine also works well in 16 to 17 year olds.

Will children experience side effects?

Children, like adults, may experience side effects after receiving a vaccination. Most side effects are mild and easily tolerated. The side effects are different for every person. You might notice tenderness or pain where the vaccine was given in the upper arm and could feel more tired than usual. Headache, achy muscles or joints, and fever and chills are also possible. These side effects are usually temporary and generally clear up within 1 to 3 days. They are also a positive sign that the vaccine is beginning to work.

Allergic reactions to the vaccine can occur, but are rare. Symptoms include hives, swelling of the face, tongue or throat, or difficulty breathing. Everyone stays at the clinic for 15 to 30 minutes after the vaccination to monitor and treat an allergic reaction if one occurs.

Who should not get the vaccine?

The vaccine is safe for most people, including anyone who has a medical condition or is taking medications. If someone is taking medications that weakens their immune system, they should speak to their doctor to time their vaccinations with their next dose of medication.

People with allergies to any of the vaccine ingredients or those who have had a serious reaction after the first dose should see their health care provider. Talk to your health care provider if you are unsure about which ingredients you are allergic to. COVID-19 vaccines do not contain eggs, gelatin (pork), gluten, latex, preservatives, antibiotics or aluminum.

Do children 12 and up require parent/guardian consent to receive their vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccines are only provided if informed consent is received from the person, including those aged 12 to 17, and as long as the child has the capability to make this decision. This means the young person understands the treatment, why it is being recommended, and the risks and benefits if they accept or refuse to be vaccinated. If the individual is incapable of consenting to receiving the vaccine, they would need consent from their substitute decision-maker, such as their parent or legal guardian.

The health care provider and family must respect a young person's decision to be vaccinated. Ideally, this decision should be discussed in advance with a trusted adult or guardian to ensure that they understand what they are consenting to. When a young person receives their vaccine, the person giving them their shot will check that they understand the nature of the treatment and its risks and benefits.

Allowing access to vaccines in a timely manner and at convenient locations, without requiring parental consent, will improve the health of students and communities and are consistent with practices before COVID-19. Parents are encouraged to discuss vaccination with their children prior to attending a clinic.

When will it be available?

By the end of May, Ontarians 12 to 17 will be able to start booking an appointment for a free vaccine. There will also be special "youth and families clinics" happening throughout the weeks of June 14 and 21. Depending on where you live, some clinics will offer pre-booking appointments and others may operate on a drop-in basis.

Timing of the booking of appointments and administration of vaccines may vary depending on where you live. Please consult your local public health unit for information about when your child will be able to receive the vaccine. It is expected that most children 12 and up will be offered their first dose in the next few months.

Which vaccine will children receive?

Children 12 and up will receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, since this is currently the only COVID-19 vaccine authorized by Health Canada for these ages. In the coming weeks, there may be other brands of vaccines authorized for children.

How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

The Pfizer-BioNtech COVID-19 vaccine tells your body how to make a harmless protein found on the COVID-19 virus and start building antibodies against it so that your immune system will know how to recognize and fight the real virus if you come in contact with it.

Can you get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. COVID-19 vaccines do not contain the virus that causes infection. COVID-19 vaccines tell our body to make antibodies that protect us from COVID-19. The antibodies can protect us from getting sick with COVID-19, as well as from getting and spreading the virus to others.

Should children get the vaccine if they have already had COVID-19?

Yes. It is advised that you get the vaccine even if you have already had COVID-19. Even though a prior COVID-19 infection may provide some protection from getting sick again, we do not know how long that protection will last and it may not protect against new variants of the virus. If you are currently recovering from COVID-19 you should delay getting the vaccine until most of your symptoms are gone and you are no longer in self-isolation.

Do you need a health card to receive the vaccine?

No. If you have a health card, you are asked to bring it to the appointment. If you do not have a health card, vaccine staff at the appointment will be able to assist you. You can also speak to your school, medical provider or faith leader to get a letter stating your child's name, date of birth and address. If you do not have a health card, you may also be asked to book your appointment over the phone instead of online.

What should you bring on the day of the appointment?

Please bring your health card and a list of any medications you may currently be taking. If you are nervous about the vaccination, bring something to help distract you, such as a mobile device, headphones for music, or a book. Let the clinic know when you get there as many will have immunizers ready to provide special assistance to children who are worried.

Children will be given a receipt with information about the vaccine they received. Please make sure to keep this in a safe place. It will also be emailed or texted if that information is provided.

What if the child has allergies or anaphylaxis?

The vaccine is not recommended for children who have had a known allergic reaction to one of the ingredients or to a previous dose of the vaccine. Serious allergic reaction to the vaccine is rare.

Will there be long-term side effects from the vaccine?

Long-term side effects from the vaccine are unknown at this time, but are not likely. Some participants in the clinical trials will continue to be followed for up to 2 years to ensure the vaccine continues to work and is safe. COVID-19 infection can have long-term effects in some people, including children. Preventing infection through vaccination can prevent the long-term effects of COVID-19.

What if the young person is behind on their regular immunization schedule? Can they still get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. If the child is behind on their immunizations please contact their health care provider to make a plan to get up to date.

Does the COVID-19 vaccine conflict with other vaccines?

If possible, the COVID-19 vaccine should be given alone. Other vaccines should be scheduled 14 days before or 28 days after the COVID-19 vaccine.

Is the vaccine safe in pregnancy?

Yes, pregnant individuals are able to receive a COVID-19 vaccine at any point in their pregnancy. Many people who are pregnant have gotten very sick from COVID-19 requiring hospitalization and critical care. Getting vaccinated is safe and an important way to be protected in pregnancy.

Will getting a COVID-19 vaccine help children go back to in-person school, sports, or other activities?

Yes. It is expected that when enough people are protected from COVID-19 the risk of infection will begin to decline. Vaccines, along with mask-wearing, physical distancing and other precautions will help protect the health of the broader community. Only after rates of COVID-19 in the broader community are low, will normal activities for children and youth be possible again.

Where can I find more information?

Visit our website for more information at www.kidshealthfirst.ca

You can also find below more information and resources about COVID-19 and vaccines:

- COVID-19 Vaccine Information Sheet (gov.on.ca)
- COVID-19 What you need to know (gov.on.ca)

Created by the Children's COVID19 Vaccine Table

This FAQ has been created by experts from the Children's COVID19 Vaccine Table, which is co-chaired by Dr. Vinita Dubey, Associate Medical Officer of Health at Toronto Public Health and Kimberly Moran, CEO of Children's Mental Health Ontario and representing the Children's Health Coalition. The purpose of the Children's COVID19 Vaccine Table is to provide strategic advice and recommendations to government regarding vaccine strategy in the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic to inform planning, process and readiness with a focus on children.

Supported by the Children's Health Coalition

The Children's Health Coalition is a growing collective of children's health organizations, including CHEO, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, SickKids, McMaster Children's Hospital, Children's Hospital – London Health Sciences Centre, Children's Mental Health Ontario and Empowered Kids Ontario.



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