

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Youth

In Ontario, children aged six months and over are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccines are safe, effective and the best way to stay protected from COVID-19. They are an important tool to help prevent serious illness and support the overall health and wellbeing of our children and communities.

Here are answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about vaccines for children and youth:



1. Aren't COVID-19 symptoms milder for children and youth?

Vaccination remains one of the most effective ways children aged six months and over can protect themselves, their families and their communities against severe outcomes from COVID-19.

While children and youth who get infected with COVID-19 typically experience mild symptoms, some can get very sick, resulting in hospitalization or ICU admission. Others can experience serious and longer-lasting symptoms. This is especially true for children who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions.

2. Is vaccination for young children aged six months to four years recommended?

Vaccination remains one of the most effective ways children aged six months and over can protect themselves, their families and their communities against severe outcomes from COVID-19. The Canadian Paediatric Society

recommends that all children aged six months and older be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Parents and caregivers of children aged six months to four years are recommended to discuss COVID-19 vaccination with their health care provider to determine the best timing and approach, especially since this age group is recommended to receive other vaccines that protect against diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella.

Children who are immunocompromised or have other significant underlying medical conditions are recommended to receive their COVID-19 vaccination.

3. How effective are COVID-19 vaccines for children?

COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are safe and effective at protecting people from getting seriously ill and being hospitalized. Getting children vaccinated against COVID-19

can help keep them from getting very sick and out of hospital if they do get infected.

Parents and caregivers are recommended to discuss COVID-19 vaccination with their health care provider to determine the best timing and approach.

4. My child had COVID-19. Should they still get vaccinated?

Even if your child has had COVID-19, they should still get the vaccine. While infection alone provides some protection, vaccination combined with infection helps further improve the immune response.

If your child is recovering from COVID-19, they should wait a minimum of four weeks to six months after symptoms start or a positive test (if they had no symptoms) before receiving the COVID-19 vaccine or their next dose of the vaccine.

Parents and caregivers are recommended to discuss the best timing for vaccination after a COVID-19 infection with their health care provider, as it could depend on the number of doses your child received and their health status.

5. How long should I wait between each dose of my child's primary series of the COVID-19 vaccine?

To provide the strongest possible protection, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)

recommends waiting eight weeks between each dose of the primary series. This is based on evidence that suggests longer intervals between doses results in a stronger immune response and higher vaccine effectiveness that is expected to last longer. This interval may also be associated with a lower risk of myocarditis and/or pericarditis.

For children and youth who are moderately to severely immunocompromised, parents and caregivers are recommended to consult with your child's health care provider around optimal timing of vaccination.

6. How can I make sure my child is up to date with their vaccinations?

For children aged five and over, staying up to date means your child has completed their primary series and has received a booster dose in the last six months.

Infants and children aged six months to four years are eligible for a primary series only. A booster dose is not approved for this age group.

Ontario continues to update vaccine eligibility and intervals as new scientific



information and guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) emerges. Please continue to visit ontario.ca/covidvaccines for current information on COVID-19 vaccine recommendations for children and youth.

7. Are vaccines safe for children and youth who are immunocompromised or have medical conditions?

Generally, children and youth with medical conditions should be vaccinated as soon as possible, since they are often at higher risk of becoming more ill if they are infected with COVID-19. Individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised may require additional doses to provide sufficient protection based on a suboptimal or waning immune response to vaccines and increased risk of COVID-19 infection.

In addition, moderately to severely immunocompromised children and youth aged five to 17 are recommended to get a booster dose as long as they have completed their primary series and it has been six months since their last dose.

8. Will the COVID-19 vaccine interfere with getting other vaccines?

Children and youth who are not up to date on other vaccines can still receive a COVID-19 vaccine. If your child is behind on immunizations, we encourage you to contact their health care provider to get up to date.

Individuals six months and older may receive a COVID-19 vaccine

simultaneously (including on the same day), or at any time before or after non-COVID-19 vaccines (including live and non-live vaccines). Parents and caregivers should discuss COVID-19 vaccination with their health care provider to determine the best timing and approach for COVID-19 vaccination.

9. Are COVID-19 vaccines safe for children and youth?

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 authorized COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective at providing a strong immune response against COVID-19 in children and youth.

10. Will children and youth receive the same dose of the COVID-19 vaccine as other age groups?

Children and youth receive vaccines based on their age at the time of vaccination, as doses vary depending on age and vaccine product.

Ontario currently has vaccine products and doses for children of different ages, including:

- age six months to four years old;
- five to 11 years old; and
- 12 to 17 years old.

Vaccinators will know which product and dose is right for each child, depending on their age. For questions about vaccinating your child, speak to your health care provider.

11. 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 receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) continues to recommend vaccination with mRNA COVID-19 vaccines for all

individuals aged six months and older since the vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe outcomes (i.e., hospitalization, death) from COVID-19. NACI also 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.

12. What will the vaccination experience be like for my child?

A number of locations offering the COVID-19 vaccine for children are customized to ensure a child-friendly environment. This includes setting up clinics to offer privacy like cubicles, offices, or family pods so you can be with your child when they receive the vaccine.

COVID-19 vaccination in primary care settings for children aged six months to four years will follow a similar experience to other routine childhood immunizations.



13. Will parents or caregivers need to provide consent for their children to get vaccinated?

Parents or legal guardians of children aged six months to four years need to provide informed consent on behalf of the child before or at the time of the appointment. This means that they must understand what the vaccine involves (for example, how it is administered), why it is recommended, and the potential risks and benefits.

14. 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. The most frequently reported short-term side effects for children following the COVID-19 vaccine include soreness and swelling or colour changes (for example red or purple), at the injection site, fatigue, headache, chills, muscle aches and loss of appetite. These side effects are typically mild to moderate and on average do not last longer than three days.

15. 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 health care provider 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.

16. Will the COVID-19 vaccine impact my child's puberty or fertility?

There is no evidence and no scientific reason to suggest that COVID-19 vaccines will affect children's later puberty or fertility.

17. 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. Allergic reactions occur less than 10 times per million people, and the risk of allergic reaction is much lower than the risk of severe disease for unvaccinated children who get COVID-19. If your child has a history of allergic reactions to vaccines or medication, please discuss this with your child's health care provider prior to vaccination.

To be safe, everyone who gets vaccinated is monitored for up to 15 minutes in case an allergic reaction occurs. Immediate reactions typically begin within an hour of administration and may even begin within minutes. However, in rarer cases, delayed reactions may appear several hours to days after administration.

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.

18. Where can I get more information?

Visit Ontario.ca/covidvaccines to learn more about COVID-19 vaccines for children and youth.

To make the best decision for your family, contact your health care provider or call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 to speak with a health specialist (TTY for people who are deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired: 1-866-797-0007), available in more than 300 languages.

If you have additional questions about vaccinating your child, you can contact the following services that also provide assistance in multiple languages:

- the COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service at sickkids.ca/vaccineconsult or 1-888-304-6558 to book a confidential phone appointment with a SickKids' registered nurse
- the VaxFacts Clinic at shn.ca/vaxfacts or 416-438-2911, ext. 5738, supported by the Scarborough Health Network, to speak with a qualified physician



Primary series: A primary series is the initial number of doses of a COVID-19 vaccine that your child needs to develop a strong initial immune response.

Booster doses: Booster doses are doses of a COVID-19 vaccine received after the primary series. Protection after a primary series may decrease over time, especially against new variants. Booster doses help keep your child protected from severe outcomes from the virus. Individuals aged five and older can receive a booster dose at a recommended interval of six months since their last dose.