

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Youth

Vaccines are safe, effective and the best way to protect your child and family from severe illness and hospitalization due to 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 serious illness, hospitalization and death from the virus. Vaccination helps protect other family members too, such as those under five years old who can't get vaccinated yet, or more vulnerable elderly individuals.

All children aged five and over are encouraged to get their COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible. As with vaccines for other diseases, your child is protected best when they stay up to date.

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

If your child has had COVID-19, they should still get the vaccine. It will help protect them from getting sick again and from variants. If your child is recovering from COVID-19, they should wait to get the vaccine. Please visit [Ontario.ca/covidvaccinekids](https://ontario.ca/covidvaccinekids) to learn how long your child should wait following COVID-19 infection.

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

Children aged five and older are recommended to receive the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. With informed consent, which should include awareness of possible elevated risk of myocarditis/pericarditis, children aged six and older may receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. To provide the strongest possible protection, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends waiting eight weeks (56 days) between the first and second dose. This is based on evidence that suggest 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. It is possible to book the second dose sooner in accordance with the product monographs, by providing informed consent and calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900.

Some children and youth who are immunocompromised can get a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine eight weeks (56 days) after their second dose as part of an extended primary series.

4. Are booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine available?

A booster dose provides better protection against COVID-19 transmission and severe disease, and is recommended for youth aged 12 to 17 at an interval of six months (168 days) after completion of their primary series. At this time, children aged five to 11 are not eligible for boosters.

5. Are vaccines safe for children and youth with 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. Some individuals aged five and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised may have a weaker immune response after two doses and are at higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19. These individuals are recommended to get a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine eight weeks after their second dose to strengthen the protection against COVID-19 and its variants.

In addition, moderately to severely immunocompromised youth aged 12 to 17 who are eligible for a three-dose primary series can get a booster dose six months (168 days) after the completion of their three-dose primary series. If your child has an underlying medical condition, please speak to their treating provider.

6. How long should my child wait between the COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines?

Children between five and 11 may be recommended to wait 14 days before or after the administration of another vaccine before getting their COVID-19 vaccine. Youth aged 12 and older do not need to wait any length of time between the COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccinations. It is safe to get your flu shot or a different vaccine at the same

time as your COVID-19 vaccine. A 14-day wait period before or after your COVID-19 vaccine is not required. Speak to your health care provider if you have questions.

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

Health Canada has authorized the Pfizer vaccine for use in children aged five and older and the Moderna vaccine for use in children aged six and older.

Children and youth aged five and over are recommended to receive the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. With informed consent, which should include awareness of possible elevated risk of myocarditis/pericarditis, children and youth aged six and over may receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

Millions of children in Canada and the US have received the COVID-19 vaccine. Overall, no concerning safety signals were observed.



8. 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). This is especially true for children who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions.

The COVID-19 vaccine will help your child fight off the virus more easily if they are infected and make their symptoms milder. While high vaccination rates have allowed the province to lift some public health measures, it is important to stay vigilant and prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in our communities by vaccinating those who have not yet received their doses.

9. 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 a distinct formulation of the Pfizer vaccine at a lower dose (one-third the amount given to individuals aged 12 and older). Children six to 11 can also receive the Moderna vaccine, at a lower dose (half the amount given to individuals aged 12 and older).

10. 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.

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 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 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 aged five to 11 will be customized to ensure a child-friendly environment. This includes providing sensory-friendly clinic options with less noise and 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, public health units have been offering 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. To find out more, please contact your local public health unit.

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

13. 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 colour changes (red or purple) 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.

14. 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.



15. 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 puberty or fertility in children.

16. 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 5-15 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.

17. 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, or call 1-888-304-6558. This service is available in multiple languages using over-the-phone language interpretation.

