

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions for Parents

Helpful information from your local pediatricians for families and caregivers.

Can my child get a COVID-19 vaccine?

As of May 11, children ages 12 and older may receive the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. Clinical trials show the Pfizer vaccine is safe and effective for children in this age range.

Other vaccines may be authorized for this age range in the future. However, at this time, only the Pfizer vaccine is available for children ages 12 and older. Current safety and efficacy testing of the vaccines for children ages 2 and up may lead to authorization of one or more of the COVID-19 vaccines for younger kids in the months ahead.

The Pfizer vaccine is currently available at Mid Coast Hospital's COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic. As eligibility expands to individuals age 12-15, parents and families are encouraged to schedule appointments in advance to avoid long wait lines and ensure vaccine is available when you arrive. Prescheduled appointments are available by visiting www.midcoasthealth.com/vaccine.

We are also working with local school systems to develop school-based clinics to make it even more convenient for children in the midcoast Maine region to get vaccinated.

COVID-19 vaccines are free whether or not you have health insurance.

Should I consider getting my child vaccinated for COVID-19?

Yes. Although COVID-19 in children is usually less severe, some kids can become very sick and have complications or long-lasting symptoms. Children also can transmit the virus even if they do not show symptoms. Vaccination helps protect children and all the people around them, including family members and friends.

Getting children vaccinated also helps protect the health of the community. Each person infected provides a chance for the virus to mutate and create a variant that might be even more dangerous or resistant to vaccines. Fewer infections reduces the chances of variants.

Can I get COVID-19 from my child?

Yes. It is possible for an infected child to transmit COVID-19 to another person. Data from some studies suggest that young children may be less likely than older children and adults to spread the coronavirus to others, but it can still happen.

How do we know COVID-19 vaccines are safe for kids?

The FDA and the U.S. CDC take vaccine safety precautions very seriously.

Before getting authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, clinical trials showed COVID-19 vaccines to be remarkably safe and effective for adults and teens age 16 and up. Trials for each of the vaccines involved tens of thousands of volunteers of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as those with different medical conditions.

The FDA, US CDC, and an independent advisory committee examine the available clinical trial data before deciding whether to authorize vaccination among different age groups, and they work with vaccine manufacturers to continue to watch for any signs of safety issues as vaccination programs continue among the public. In fact, the U.S. CDC notes that COVID-19 vaccines have the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history.

Based on clinical trial results for younger children, the FDA has extended authorization of the Pfizer vaccine for children as young as age 12. Clinical trials are starting for children as young as six months old.

How effective are the vaccines?

Research shows that all of the COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at stopping people from getting COVID-19, including the Pfizer vaccine authorized for children ages 12 and older. Vaccines also help prevent serious illness, hospitalization, and death in those who get COVID-19.

Scientists do not yet know how long immunity from the vaccine will protect people. This will become clearer in the future.



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How does the COVID-19 vaccine work in children?

Germs such as the virus that causes COVID-19 invade and multiply inside a child's body. The COVID-19 vaccine works like other vaccines your child has received. The vaccine stops the germs by helping your child's immune system make special proteins called antibodies to fight the virus.

It will take around two weeks after getting the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine for your child's body to build up an immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19. After vaccination, your child has less of a chance of getting COVID-19. If they do get infected with the virus, they may not be as sick as they would without the vaccine.

If my child experiences side effects from getting a COVID-19 vaccine, will they be the same side effects as adults?

Yes. Pfizer has reported that side effects of the shots appear to be similar in children and adults.

As with adults, some children will not have any side effects at all. Additionally, the most common side effects that have been reported are mild. Your child might notice pain, redness, or swelling at the injection site in their upper arm. They could also feel more tired than usual. Headache, achy muscles or joints, nausea, and even fever and chills are also possible.

These side effects are usually temporary and generally clear up within 48 hours. The CDC notes that long-term side effects are unlikely. We have years of research and monitoring on other vaccinations that show side effects almost always happen within six weeks of getting a vaccine.

While very rare, some people have had allergic reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine. This is why you and your child will need to wait for 15 to 30 minutes after they receive their vaccination. If your child happens to be one of the few people who has an allergic reaction, there are medications to quickly treat it.

How are mRNA and viral vector vaccines different?

Some COVID-19 vaccines such as the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use mRNA technology. This mRNA technology is not new, and mRNA vaccines have been widely and safely used for other conditions such as Zika and Ebola for over 10 years.

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines carry instructions to our cells to produce harmless pieces of spike protein found on the COVID-19 virus. This triggers an immune system response that the body remembers if it becomes infected with coronavirus.

These vaccines do not use the live coronavirus that causes COVID-19. The mRNA in the vaccine gets into the cells where the shot is given. Once the protein is created, your immune system identifies it as a foreign body. The immune process starts, making antibodies that attach to the protein. These antibodies then protect you from getting COVID-19.

Do mRNA vaccines change your child's DNA?

No. The mRNA does not interact with your child's DNA at all. DNA is genetic material stored in the nucleus of a cell. The mRNA in the vaccines does not get into the cell's nucleus. Once your immune cells have used the instructions, they break down the mRNA and discard it.

Will getting the COVID-19 vaccine help my child go back to school, sports, and other activities?

It is expected that when enough people are protected from the coronavirus, the risk of infection for your child will begin to decline, even before vaccines are available for all children. Vaccines, along with the other safety precautions currently in place, will help ensure your child's gradual return to school, sports, and other group activities in the future.

Even after your child is vaccinated, they should continue to follow the latest safety guidelines until they are updated by public health officials.



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