

## Let's Talk About...

# The COVID-19 Vaccine and Your Child's Health: Answers to common questions

The Pfizer [FYE-zer] COVID-19 vaccine is now available for children between 5 to 11 year old as well as adolescents and teens between 12 to 17 years old. This is a big step in the fight against the disease, but it also raises questions for many parents. Here you will find answers to many of the most commonly-asked questions from the children's health experts at Primary Children's Hospital. Be sure to talk with your child's healthcare provider about your decision and any other questions you may have.

## Why does my child need the COVID-19 vaccine?

The biggest benefit of your child getting the COVID-19 vaccine is to protect them from the disease. Other benefits include:

- Being able to participate safely in school, sports and activities, and play dates with friends
- Traveling with family
- Protecting others around them, like grandparents, infants, and toddlers
- Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the community

Children have a lower risk of getting severely sick from COVID-19. However, low risk does not mean no risk. In Utah in 2021, more than 600 children between 5 and 17 years old were hospitalized with severe symptoms. Two died. Over 100 children in Utah developed Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). This can cause dangerous inflammation of the heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, skin, eyes, and gastrointestinal organs.

Some children who got COVID continued to have symptoms that last 12 weeks or more after the infection was over. The informal name for this condition is **long-COVID**. Symptoms of long-COVID include fatigue (extreme tiredness), difficulty concentrating, muscle and joint pain, sleeplessness, headache, and uneven heartbeat.



## How many Pfizer doses should a child get to be fully immunized?

Children between 5 and 11 years old should get 2 doses of the Pfizer vaccine at least 3 weeks apart.

## Is the Pfizer vaccine effective for children?

Yes. The vaccine is 90.7% effective. In other words, children 5 to 11 years old who are vaccinated with 2 doses of the vaccine are 10 times less likely to get infected than kids who have not been vaccinated .

## Is the Pfizer vaccine safe?

Yes. There have been no serious reactions reported among children who are age 5 to 11 so far. Serious reactions or complications—if they happen at all—will likely show up in the first 2 weeks after vaccination. The risk of getting the virus or having complications from the virus is much higher.

## What are the side effects?

Your child may have redness and soreness at the injection site. They may also have other mild symptoms, such as swollen lymph nodes, fever, or chills. These symptoms are a sign that your child's immune (disease fighting) system is responding well to the vaccine. You may treat these symptoms with acetaminophen [ah-see-tuh-MIN-eh-fen] (Tylenol or others) or ibuprofen [eye-byoo-PRO-fen] (Motrin, Advil, or others) to relieve the symptoms. **No cases of severe allergic reactions or heart problems were reported in the 5 to 11 age group during the trial period.**

This does not mean they will not be some very rare complications that are detected after several million children are vaccinated. The US has extensive surveillance for rare complications so we will continue to watch and learn in real time.

## What should we watch for after the vaccination?

Watch for swelling of the lymph nodes, particularly in the armpit or neck. This may last for a few days but is usually not a problem. Some children have reported rashes that go away. If you have any questions about the severity of the side effects, please contact your child's healthcare provider.

## What if my child has a medical condition?

It is important that children who have a medical condition (cancer, diabetes, obesity, lung or heart disease, organ transplant, etc.) get the vaccine. This is because they are more likely to develop severe illness if they get COVID-19. Children with medical conditions are not more likely to have a severe reaction to the vaccine. However, for some, the “immunity boost” from the vaccine may not be as strong as it would be in a child with a healthy immune system. Talk with your child's healthcare provider to understand how best to protect their child, even after vaccination.

## What else can I do to protect my child from COVID-19?

To protect your child, encourage family members and others who are around your child to get a COVID vaccine. Follow other best practices to protect against the disease, such as wearing a mask, washing or sanitizing your hands often, and avoiding crowds.

## When and where can children get the vaccine?

COVID vaccines are available to children 5 to 11 years old as of November 8, 2021 in select Intermountain Medical Group clinics, at the Primary Children's Hospital's Community Pharmacy, and at other locations through [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

You can also check the vaccine locations here:

[intermountainhealthcare.org/Health-Wellness-Promotion/Vaccines/COVID/](https://www.intermountainhealthcare.org/Health-Wellness-Promotion/Vaccines/COVID/)

## Will my child need to wear a mask if they are fully vaccinated?

Yes, for now. Until COVID-19 transmission rates go down and vaccination rates go up, there's still a chance your child can become infected. Remember, the vaccine is very good at preventing serious illness and hospitalization, but a mild case is still possible. People with mild cases can still spread the disease.

## What are some common myths and disinformation about the vaccine?

There is a lot of false information being spread in the community about the vaccine. Here is some information on the most common myths and concerns:

- **Heart problems.** This is a concern, but the risk may be exaggerated. Studies show an increased risk of **myocarditis** [my-oh-car-DIE-tiss] (inflammation of the heart muscle) and **pericarditis** [pear-ee-car-DIE-tiss] (inflammation of tissue surrounding the heart) after vaccination with the Pfizer vaccine. **These complications are rare.** They happen most often after getting the second dose, and in males 16 to 25 year old. Most children who were treated for myocarditis or pericarditis responded well to medicine and rest and felt better within a couple days. **The risk of developing similar heart conditions from getting COVID is much higher than from the rare vaccine reaction.** Studies show that the benefits of the vaccine outweigh its risks for children who are 5 to 11 years old.
- **Allergies.** Some parents worry that their children may have an allergic reaction to the vaccine. Most children who are age 5 have already received many vaccines. Families will likely know by then know if their child is likely to have a serious reaction to a vaccine.
- **Infertility.** There is no evidence that the vaccines cause problems with fertility. The idea that the vaccine causes infertility is a myth based on false information shared when the COVID-19 vaccines were first given and has since been disproven.
- **Pregnancy.** COVID-19 vaccines are safe and recommended for those who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Getting COVID-19 itself increases the risk of hospitalization, having a preterm (early) birth, and even death.
- **Puberty.** There is nothing in the vaccine that can affect your child's hormones, brains, or puberty.



## Does the vaccine protect against variants of the virus?

Over time, some viruses—like COVID-19 or the flu—can change the way they infect people and animals. These “new” viruses are called **variants** [VAIR-ee-entz]. Studies show that the Pfizer vaccine protects against the COVID-19 variants that we know about. This is important because the natural protection you get from having an older variant of the COVID-19 virus does not provide as much protection against new variants.

## How was the vaccine tested in children and adolescents?

Pfizer started testing the vaccine in children and adolescents once it became clear that the vaccines were safe and effective for adults. Of the children who were tested, some got 2 doses of the vaccine and others got a placebo (fake shot). Blood samples were taken before and after they got the vaccine. The children were followed very closely for 2 to 3 months. The results of the study showed that 10 unvaccinated children were infected with COVID compared to only 1 vaccinated child.

## The vaccine was authorized for emergency use. Does that mean it skipped the normal safety reviews?

No. The safety and effectiveness studies on the Pfizer vaccine are very similar to what is done normally. The studies included the same number of participants who would have been studied in ordinary vaccine studies. One big reason the vaccine became available so quickly is because the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) was able to speed up processes and waiting periods between phases. It is these waiting periods that usually slow down drug approvals in normal times.

## Do kids really spread the disease?

Yes. Children spread COVID-19 and play a big role in community spread. Current trends show that when there are high case counts in schools, higher rates in the rest of the population show up 1 or 2 weeks later. Children and teenagers often spend time in groups. This means they are more likely to spread and infection to many people at once. The CDC estimates that vaccinating children who are 5 to 11 years old will result in 600,000 fewer cases of COVID in the U.S. between November 2021 and March 2022.

## Can my child get the COVID-19 vaccine when they get other needed vaccines?

Yes. Children between ages 5 and 17 need several vaccinations, including diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, measles, chickenpox, flu, HPV, and more. Those vaccines can be safely given together.

## Should my child wait a while, until there are more studies available?

There is not a reason to wait, given how much COVID is impacting children in Utah. However, the most important thing is for families to speak with their healthcare team about the safety of the vaccine, its effectiveness, and what it means for their children.

## What if I still have concerns about my child being vaccinated?

We encourage you to make an appointment with your child's healthcare provider and ask questions.

### Where can I learn more?

You can find more information about the vaccine at these links:

- Intermountain Healthcare  
[intermountainhealthcare.org/Health-Wellness-Promotion/Vaccines/COVID/](https://intermountainhealthcare.org/Health-Wellness-Promotion/Vaccines/COVID/)
- Utah Department of Health  
[coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine](https://coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine)
- FDA  
[FDA.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines](https://FDA.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines)

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