

Children with Complex Health Needs and the COVID-19 Vaccine

Family & Caregiver FAQ

All children ages 5 to 17, including those with complex health needs, are now eligible to get the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. This is currently the only vaccine approved for children. This vaccine is given in two doses. The second shot is given 3 weeks (or 21 days) after the first.

The vaccine is safe, effective, and free. You don't need identification or insurance to get it. The following questions have been asked by local parents and caregivers of children with complex health needs.



Why should I consider getting my child with complex health needs vaccinated?

- Children with complex health needs are more likely to become sick with COVID-19 than children without complex health needs.
- The vaccine provides protection from COVID-19 and dramatically reduces the risk of infection, severe disease, hospitalization, and death.
- Vaccinated people who become infected with COVID-19 are less likely to have serious complications or die. This is especially true for those with chronic health conditions.

Is the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine safe and effective for children with complex health needs?

- Available data on the billions of doses provided around the world indicate that the COVID-19 vaccine is effective at preventing severe illness.
- Local and systemic reactions following the vaccine are less common in children aged 5-11 compared to young adults aged 12-25.
- It is currently unknown whether there are differences in vaccine effectiveness or side effects for children with complex health needs.
- While the risk of a child having a serious reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine is very low, one rare complication is inflammation of the heart muscle, or myocarditis. Children are still much more likely to get myocarditis from the COVID-19 infection than from the vaccine.
- For more information on COVID-19 and the vaccine, see guidance by the American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>

I've decided to get my child with complex health needs vaccinated. What should I expect after they receive each dose?

- Shortly after your child gets the vaccine, they may experience mild side effects, such as pain or swelling where the vaccine was given (typically the arm). Some children may have headache, fatigue, chills, or fever though those side effects appear happen less in children than adults, particularly for 5-11 year olds.
- Arm soreness at injection site is the most common side effect. Severe side effects are very rare.

How is the COVID-19 vaccine different from other vaccines, like the flu or chicken pox?

- The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine relies on messenger RNA (mRNA).
- mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that will trigger an immune response inside our bodies.
- mRNA vaccines are newly available to the public. However, researchers have been studying and working with mRNA vaccines for decades.

Were children with complex health needs included in the COVID-19 vaccine trials?

- 20% of children included in vaccine trials had coexisting conditions which increased their risk for severe COVID-19 disease. This includes children with complex health needs or rare diseases.
- Many systems are in place to monitor for vaccine complications among the millions of children who have already received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Should I wait to vaccinate my child with complex health needs until more studies have been done?

- Children with complex health needs are at increased risk for severe illness and hospitalization from COVID-19. The vaccine has been shown to provide protection from these risks.
- In general, conditions which contribute to medical complexity, such as congenital heart disease and neurologic disorders, do not predispose a child to complications from the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Questions about individual situations should be addressed with the child's provider.

Are there any concerns about vaccinating a child who relies on specific medications to manage a complex health condition?

- Medications are very unlikely to increase any risks associated with vaccination.
- Some medicines that suppress the body's immune system or treat autoimmune disorders may reduce vaccine effectiveness.
- Questions about specific medications should be addressed with the child's provider.

How do I get my homebound child vaccinated?

- Contact your local health department to learn more about vaccination options for homebound children.

Visit these resources to learn more!

General information on vaccinating children ages 5-11 (Wisconsin Department of Human Services):

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/vaccine.htm>

Find a vaccination site near you (Center for Disease Control): <https://www.vaccines.gov/search/>

Resources related to the Safe Return to School for Children with Complex Health Needs: <https://reset4kids.org/>