



Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination for children and young people

How do I decide if my child should be vaccinated against COVID-19?

- As of April 2022, vaccination has been offered to all children aged 5 years and older in the UK. It has also been offered to children of any age who have serious illnesses or learning disabilities. However, some parents and carers are concerned about the potential risks of vaccination, possibly influenced by stories in the media.
- Medicines for Children has put together this information to help parents and carers decide whether to vaccinate their children against COVID-19. We explain the possible risk of harm to children if they get infected with COVID, and the possible risks associated with vaccination. The risks of harm are extremely low in both situations but, overall, the benefit of vaccination is thought to be greater than the risk of harm.
- Remember, that when experts make recommendations, they take into account all the available information and recommend the approach that provides the greatest benefit. However, these decisions are for whole populations, whereas parents make decisions for individual children
- It is important that your child takes this medicine in the way that your doctor has told you to so that it kills the harmful bacteria and gets rid of the infection.

Why is vaccination important?

Vaccination against COVID-19 is important to protect your child against the infection. It will also help to reduce the spread of the virus across the population, so that fewer people are infected. This helps to protect people who cannot have the vaccination for various reasons. The need for widespread vaccination has become more relevant as children have returned to school, and society is mixing more freely.

What are the current recommendations?

The recommendations for vaccinating children have been updated regularly as more information becomes available.

Current recommendations can be found on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine

What are the risks associated with COVID-19 infection?

Many adults who died from COVID-19 were older people with other medical conditions. However, COVID-19 can very rarely cause severe illness in children, and there have been very few deaths – an estimated 25 in the first year of the pandemic in the UK. To put this into context, 3105 children died from other causes in the same period.

Myocarditis

- COVID-19 infection has caused myocarditis in a few children. This is inflammation of the heart muscle, which causes chest pain and changes in the heartbeat. Symptoms are usually mild and don't last long.

Paediatric multisystem inflammatory syndrome (PIMS)

- A small number of children have developed a severe inflammatory condition after COVID-19 infection called PIMS (paediatric multisystem inflammatory syndrome).
- This is a delayed effect of the body trying to overcome the virus. It is thought that only 5 of 1000 children infected with COVID will get PIMS. However, not all children who get PIMS have had COVID or have been noticeably unwell – so PIMS can have other causes
- Although PIMS is a serious condition, it can be treated successfully in hospital. Sadly doctors think that two children may have died with PIMS in the UK, but they can't be certain that there weren't other reasons why the children died.
- You can find out more about PIMS here: www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/pims-covid-19-linked-syndrome-affecting-children-information-families

What are the risks associated with vaccination?

- Millions of COVID vaccinations have now been administered worldwide.
- Most people have had no symptoms or mild symptoms afterwards – usually flu-like (fever, aches and pains, headache, general unwellness) and tenderness or pain in their arm at the site of injection.
- The currently available vaccines do not contain any live virus, so they are safe for children who are immunocompromised. It is not yet clear whether the vaccine works as well as in people with compromised immunity.

What are the risks associated with vaccination? (continued)

- The currently available vaccines do not contain egg or latex (which some people are allergic to).
- There is no evidence that people with a history of allergy are at risk of allergic reaction to the vaccine.
- The risk of allergy was raised as a concern after two people developed serious reactions soon after the vaccines were introduced. Yet monitoring of over 1 million vaccinations did not identify any cases of allergic reaction.
- People who are allergic to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or polysorbate may be at risk a serious allergic reaction to particular vaccines – your doctor will be able to tell you which vaccine is suitable for your child if they are allergic to either of these substances.
- A few cases of myocarditis have been reported following COVID vaccination, with slightly more boys than girls affected. However, the numbers are VERY small –1 in 100,000 children.
- There is no evidence that children with health conditions, including immune-related conditions, are at increased risk from the vaccination.
- Some children may be at greater risk of severe illness if they are infected with COVID – many of these children were encouraged to self-isolate during the first waves of the pandemic for this reason. These children are likely to benefit from vaccination.

How do I weigh up the benefits against the risks?

- There is a lot of information on the Internet, and not all of it is accurate. It is important to go to websites of established organizations such as the RCPCH, WellChild, the NHS and registered charities.
- The media (newspapers, magazines and social media) have tended to exaggerate the possible risks of vaccination, which can be worrying for parents.
- The media storm following two cases of a serious allergic reaction is an example – in reality, no serious allergic reactions were identified following more than 1 million doses.
- Be aware of people who have strong opinions about vaccination but who do not have a good understanding of the evidence. In particular, be aware of “anti-vax” individuals and groups who campaign against all vaccinations for various reasons.
- Every child is different. Try not to be swayed by individual friends or family who have strong opinions but are in different situations. It is important that you focus on your child.
- Many parents and carers are just as fearful of vaccinating their children as they are of their children getting COVID-19. Remember that the advice provided by Government to vaccinate children is based on the best available evidence.
- As an example of the benefits and risks of vaccinations, it has been estimated that if 1 million boys aged 12–17 years had two doses of vaccine, this would prevent 5,700 infections, 215 admissions to hospital, and two deaths, whereas 70 children might develop myocarditis (which can be treated).

www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk



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The primary source for the information in this leaflet is the British National Formulary for Children. For details on any other sources used for this leaflet, please contact us through our website, www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk

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