



COVID-19 Vaccines for Children 6 Months – Under 5 Years of Age

December 21, 2022

As the weather has gotten colder and people spend more time indoors, there has been a rise of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. Vaccination continues to:

- Lower the risk of becoming seriously sick from COVID-19. Healthy children have been hospitalized from COVID-19. Vaccination protects from serious complications.
- Protect against long COVID. In children, long COVID can cause difficulty concentrating (such as having new difficulties learning at school).
- Make child care, school, and other activities safer.

Vaccine Availability

Health Canada has approved the pediatric Moderna Spikevax (25 mcg) and pediatric Pfizer-BioNTech (3 mcg) mRNA vaccines. Children must be 6 months of age or older at the time of vaccination.

For the best protection, children need to complete a primary vaccine series with the same vaccine brand:

- 2 doses of pediatric Moderna (25 mcg) are given at 8 weeks apart for children 6 months to under 6 years old; OR
- 3 doses of pediatric Pfizer (3 mcg) are given at 8 weeks between doses for children 6 months to under 5 years old.

Mixing vaccines is not recommended for your child's primary series. Children should get their age-appropriate dose at the time of the vaccination.

Children who have a very weak immune system may require additional doses of vaccine. Pediatric Moderna (25 mcg) is preferred for children who are moderately to severely immunocompromised. This will allow for them to complete their primary series with three doses instead of the four doses needed for pediatric Pfizer-BioNTech (3 mcg).

How the Vaccine Works

The mRNA vaccines teach our immune system to make antibodies that protect us from COVID-19. The vaccines do not contain the COVID-19 virus, so a child cannot get an infection from the vaccine. It takes at least two weeks after each vaccine dose to have protection.

A complete primary series is required for best protection.

Vaccine Ingredients and Allergies

The mRNA vaccines contains lipids (fats), salts, sugars and buffers. They do not contain eggs, gelatin (pork), gluten, latex, preservatives, antibiotics, or aluminum. These vaccines are safe for children with food, medication or environmental allergies.

Speak with a health care provider if the child is allergic to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or tromethamine (Tris). Allergic reactions, including serious reactions (anaphylaxis), are rare. Allergic reactions can be treated and are usually temporary. Get medical help if a child has trouble breathing, or develops hives or swelling in the face and throat.

Side Effects and Risks

Side effects in children are similar to those in youth and adults. They are usually mild, and last one to three days. Side effects usually mean that the vaccine is working.

Common side effects include:

- redness, swelling or pain where the vaccine was given
- headache
- feeling tired
- joint pain and/or muscle aches
- chills and/or fever
- nausea and/or vomiting

Get medical attention if a child has a high fever (over 40°C) or side effects that last more than three days after vaccination.

Myocarditis and Pericarditis

Myocarditis and pericarditis (types of heart inflammation) can occur after a COVID-19 infection and can be serious.

In clinical trials for the pediatric mRNA vaccines, no cases of myocarditis or pericarditis were reported and no new safety concerns were identified.

Get medical attention if a child develops chest pain, shortness of breath, or a racing heart a few weeks after vaccination. Vaccination is still recommended as the benefits are greater than any risk.

Wait to Get Vaccinated

Getting vaccinated is still strongly recommended even if your child had a COVID-19 infection. If your child has symptoms of COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19, you should wait until they are feeling better to get them vaccinated. If self-isolation is required, children should wait until their isolation period is over. To maximize their immune response, it is recommended to wait 8 weeks from when their symptoms started or they tested positive to get vaccinated. It's recommended that children with weak immune systems wait 4 weeks.

COVID-19 and other Vaccines

The COVID-19 vaccine can be given at the same time or any time before or after receiving any other vaccines for children under 5 years of age.

Informed Consent to Get the Vaccine

Parent/guardian consent is required to get vaccinated. Informed consent should also include a discussion of the benefits and risks of getting a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as or shortly before or after other vaccines.

Consult a Health Care Provider if child(ren):

- Takes medications that weaken their immune system – timing of the vaccination and medication(s) may need to be considered
- Had an allergic reaction four hours after getting their first COVID-19 vaccine dose
- Has severe allergies to any of the vaccine ingredients
- Had Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome (MIS-C)

For more information: Talk to your health care provider and visit toronto.ca/COVID19