

ASK THE EXPERT



Does My Young Child Really Need a COVID-19 Vaccine?

Until recently, kids had to be at least 5 years old to get a COVID-19 vaccine. That changed in June, when the FDA authorized the use of two vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer) for children as young as 6 months old. We talked to Gina Cuyler, MD, FACP, about what this news means for families.

Q. Dr. Cuyler, I've heard that getting COVID-19 is like having a cold for kids. Are vaccines really important for children this young?

✔ **COVID-19 can be serious at any age.** Many children with the disease do have mild symptoms or none at all. But some become very sick. In fact, tens of thousands of children and teens in this country have been hospitalized with COVID-19.

Anyone can be affected. But some groups have been hit extra hard. Across the U.S., hospitalization rates from COVID-19 have been more than two times higher in Hispanic, Black, and Native American children and teens, compared with non-Hispanic white youth.

Vaccines help protect against these bad outcomes. They are very effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19.

Gina Cuyler, MD, FACP

Dr. Gina Cuyler, vice president of health equity and community investments for Excellus BCBS, is a board-certified internal medicine physician and sets the organization's direction to promote health equity, cultural sensitivity, and community health.

Q. That's eye-opening, Dr. Cuyler. But I still have some concerns. How do we know that the vaccines are safe for babies and small children?

✔ **You can be assured that these are among the most closely studied vaccines in history.** Thousands of children took part in rigorous clinical trials. The results showed that the vaccines are safe and effective for kids ages 6 months and older. And the FDA and CDC continue to monitor their safety.

Keep in mind that young children don't receive the same amount of the vaccine as teens and adults. They get a smaller dose that's just right for their age.

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Q. Will the vaccine affect my child's reproductive development? Can it change their DNA?

- ✓ **No. These concerns come from some unfounded claims that have been going around on the Internet.** But here's the truth: There is no proof the vaccines affect puberty in kids. (Science has also dispelled the myth that vaccines cause infertility in adults.)

What's more, the vaccines do not interact with your DNA in any way. DNA is found in the nucleus of cells. The material in COVID-19 vaccines never goes into the nucleus.

Q. My child already had COVID-19. Can we skip the vaccine?

- ✓ **It's not recommended. Having COVID-19 once doesn't rule out getting it again.** Your child's body may have built up some defenses after being infected. But these natural defenses vary in how strong they are and how long they'll last. The CDC recommends that children who've had COVID-19 still get vaccinated. Vaccines offer added protection against future run-ins with the virus.



Q. Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine for my child?

- ✓ **Free COVID-19 vaccines are available from many health care providers and pharmacies.** Ask your child's pediatrician if they offer the vaccine. Or to find other vaccine locations near you:
- Search **Vaccines.gov**
 - Call COVID-19 Vaccine Hotline at **1-800-232-0233**, (TTY: 888-720-7489)
 - Text GETVAX ("VACUNA" FOR SP) to **438829**

Q. That's good to know, Dr. Cuyler. Do you have any parting thoughts for parents like me who have a child younger than 5?

- ✓ **I'm excited that COVID-19 vaccines are now here for children 6 months and up!** If you have not done so already, I suggest scheduling your child's first dose as soon as possible. For kids in this age group, the Moderna vaccine requires two doses. The Pfizer vaccine requires three doses. Talk with your child's pediatrician if you have specific questions or concerns.

Make sure any older children and adults in your family are vaccinated against COVID-19 as well. That includes boosters for those who are eligible. Remember that COVID-19 vaccines protect against serious illness in people of all ages. As a parent who wants to stay your healthiest for your family, getting a vaccine is a good choice for you, too.

The information in this document is current as of July 19, 2022.
For the latest information on COVID-19, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention online at [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).
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