



## Question

# When can kids get the COVID vaccine or booster?



**James D. Campbell, MD, MS, FAAP**

## Answer

Vaccines and boosters are our best hope to move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, COVID-19 vaccines are here for babies and young children. COVID vaccines and boosters (<https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/do-i-qualify-covid-19-vaccine-booster-and-which-one>) are recommended for all kids age 5 years and up.



Two long-awaited COVID-19 vaccines for babies and young children were authorized by the Food and Drug Administration (<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-moderna-and-pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccines-children>) (FDA). A transparent and thorough review of clinical trial data has been completed and indicates the vaccines are safe and effective for their age group. Children are not little adults; we can't just assume a vaccine will have the same effect on a child as it does for someone older.

The **American Academy of Pediatrics** (<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2022-058700>) (AAP) and the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/s0618-children-vaccine.html>) (CDC) recommend the COVID-19 vaccine for babies and young children age 6 months to under age 5. There is no preference for the Moderna vaccine or the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine in this age group.

As more contagious strains of the virus are spreading quickly and infecting more people, COVID-19 vaccines and boosters are especially important. All ages will benefit if everyone eligible gets fully vaccinated and boosted.

Research shows that COVID-19 vaccines are remarkably effective and safe. The COVID vaccine protects kids from serious disease and hospitalization from COVID. People who are not vaccinated and become infected also may be at higher risk of long-term effects from their infection (known as long COVID or post-COVID conditions).

The AAP urges that children and adults should get the COVID vaccine and booster as soon as they are eligible.

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

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## When do kids get each COVID shot or booster?

Many childhood vaccines are given as a series of two, three or more doses spaced apart. Some vaccinations require a booster dose. And the flu shot, for example, is given every year to protect us from new and different strains.

The size of the dose depends on their age, with babies and young children age 6 months to 5 years getting a smaller dose (</English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/covid-vaccines-for-kids-6-months-and-older-faqs-for-families.aspx>) than kids age 5 through 11 or kids age 12 and older.

The COVID vaccine series that is recommended for kids is two separate doses given 3 to 8 weeks apart for kids 12 to 17 years old. The COVID shot for children 5 years to 11 years of age is a lower dose than the dose recommended for people 12 years and older and given 21 days apart.

An additional primary series dose (3 doses) plus one booster dose are recommended for some children and teens age 5 years and older who have certain medical conditions or take medicines that weaken the immune system.

All kids 5 and up need a booster dose if it has been at least five months since they had their second dose of COVID vaccine. The additional doses or booster doses are to help them develop as much protection as possible against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

## Are COVID-19 vaccines required for school entry?

Once a vaccine is approved, health authorities, including the CDC and the AAP, recommend when and how children should get it. However, each state's government decides which vaccines are required for school (</English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Return-to-School-During-COVID-19.aspx>) entry.

In the meantime, make sure your children are caught up (</English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Why-is-it-important-for-my-kids-to-get-childhood-immunizations-during-COVID-19.aspx>) on their vaccinations against measles, influenza (</English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/How-is-the-Flu-Different-From-COVID-19.aspx>), whooping cough, and any others that your pediatrician recommends.

## Do kids need the vaccine if they had COVID?

If your child has an active COVID-19 infection, they should wait to get vaccinated until they've recovered. They should also follow their recommended isolation period (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>) first. This also applies to children who become infected with COVID-19 between doses of vaccine.

They still should get the recommended doses and booster even if they had COVID because two doses of an mRNA vaccine followed by one booster dose has been shown to provide the strongest, broadest, and most long-lasting protection, both in people who have and who have not had COVID infection previously.

One thing is certain: COVID-19 vaccines are preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death for hundreds of millions (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1065481/covid-19-vaccinations-distributed-and-administered-us/>) of people who've received them already. We are hopeful now that our youngest children can get the vaccines, too, and can enjoy their communities safely.

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## More information

- [COVID Vaccines for Kids 6 Months and Older: FAQs for Families \(/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/covid-vaccines-for-kids-6-months-and-older-faqs-for-families.aspx\)](/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/covid-vaccines-for-kids-6-months-and-older-faqs-for-families.aspx)
- [If my child had COVID-19 already, do they need the vaccine? \(/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/If-my-child-had-COVID-do-they-need-the-vaccine.aspx\)](/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/If-my-child-had-COVID-do-they-need-the-vaccine.aspx)
- [The Science Behind COVID-19 Vaccines \(/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/The-Science-Behind-the-COVID-19-Vaccine-Parent-FAQs.aspx\)](/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/The-Science-Behind-the-COVID-19-Vaccine-Parent-FAQs.aspx)



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The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.