

Ask the expert



As the COVID-19 vaccine development and testing continues, the vaccine is now available for children ages 5 and up.

Is the vaccine safe for children? What if a child has allergies? Will children have different side effects than adults? Dr. Lorna Fitzpatrick, a pediatrician and our Vice President of Medical Affairs, shares the answers to frequently asked questions.

Q. Dr. Fitzpatrick, children are unlikely to have a severe case of COVID-19. Why should they get vaccinated?

✔ **It's important to keep our children safe, and the vaccine is a tool that offers protection.** Sadly, the rate of COVID-19 in children has risen over the last several months. Although most children will not get seriously ill from COVID-19, transmission and serious cases still happen. In fact, children now represent roughly 25% of new COVID-19 cases, and that number has been increasing in recent months. Now that schools and after-school activities have resumed, the number has been rising. Socialization is important for a child's mental and social health. We want to be able to be together as safely as possible. As a pediatrician and mother, I'm glad to see a vaccine option for our younger population.

Lorna K. Fitzpatrick, MD

Dr. Lorna K. Fitzpatrick is the Vice President of Medical Affairs at Univera Healthcare. She is board-certified in pediatrics and pediatric hematology-oncology and obtained her medical degree at Jacobs School of Medicine, Buffalo, New York, and continued on to residency in pediatrics at St. Louis Children's Hospital/Washington University, St. Louis. She completed a fellowship in pediatric hematology-oncology at Johns Hopkins University. While there, she participated in the graduate training program in clinical investigation at the Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Q. We agree, safety is key. Will children have different side effects than adults? Should they stay home from school after getting the vaccine?

✔ **Children have had similar side effects as adults.** The most common side effects seen have been pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache, chills, fever and some aches and pains. Your child does not need to stay home after being vaccinated and can continue with their regular activities. If your child doesn't feel well or has a fever after the vaccine, it's a good idea to let them stay home and rest.

Q. Should a parent be concerned about the vaccine affecting their child's growth or development?

✔ **There is no indication that the COVID-19 vaccine will interfere with a child's growth and development.**

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Q. That is great to hear. But what if a child has allergies? Should they still get the vaccine?

- ✔ **Currently, the recommendation is that the vaccine should not be given to anyone who has a history of severe or immediate allergic reactions to vaccines.** If your child is allergic to any component of the COVID-19 vaccine, they should not get it. If you have concerns, reach out to your child's doctor for guidance.

Q. That is good to know, Dr. Fitzpatrick. As a mother, are you comfortable with your children getting vaccinated?

- ✔ **I am. Each parent should make decisions for their own child.** As a mother, I researched the information, relied on experts and made the decision that all my children should get vaccinated, and they all are.

Q. What would you say to a parent who is hesitant about vaccinating their child without having access to long-term studies?

- ✔ **As a parent, I know that we often must make difficult decisions for our children.** There are so many sources of information, and non-scientific information is often mixed in with the scientific information. For parents who are struggling with the decision, I would encourage them to reach out to their child's doctor and discuss the vaccine. Ask specific questions and share your concerns openly. I also recommend that parents seek out reputable, fact-based resources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Look at the facts, ask questions and look to your child's doctor to help you sort through the information and make an informed decision.



Q. Any update on vaccines for children younger than 5 years old?

- ✔ **So far, only ages 5 and up have been approved to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.** The great news is that the vaccine is currently being studied in children as young as 6 months old. The hope is that it will be just as safe and effective as it is in older children and receive approval.