



# Deciding on COVID-19 vaccination for children

This page is to help you decide about COVID-19 vaccination for your child age 6 months or older.

If you would like to know how to book an appointment or where to get vaccinated, find out how to get your child their COVID-19 vaccine (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/children/>).

## Who should get vaccinated

We particularly recommend that your child gets vaccinated against COVID-19 if they:

- have a health condition that puts them at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/people-at-higher-risk/overview/#conditions-that-put-you-at-higher-risk>)
- are age 5 or older and live with someone who is at higher risk of COVID-19

But all parents should consider getting their child vaccinated. Getting your child vaccinated is a decision between you and your child.

## Benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine

COVID-19 vaccination should protect your child from getting seriously ill from COVID-19 if they are at higher risk from COVID-19 (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/people-at-higher-risk/overview/>).

It may also protect healthy children from:

- COVID-19 illness which can be severe in very rare cases
- paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS or MIS-C) (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/covid-19-vaccination-for-children/#pims-or-mis-c>) from COVID-19, a rare complication that can affect children as young as 3 months of age
- the risk of having 'long COVID' symptoms, such as fatigue, which can continue for weeks or months
- spreading COVID-19 to others

If your child is vaccinated they will be less likely to miss school, childcare and other activities because of being ill with COVID-19.

## COVID-19 and children

Most children who get COVID-19 have very mild symptoms or no symptoms.

But children who get COVID-19 need to avoid contact with other people even if their symptoms are mild.

If your child has COVID-19 (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/if-you-have-covid-19/children/>)

## Serious illness is rare

COVID-19 rarely causes serious illness, hospitalisation or death in children.

The risk of a child being hospitalised because of COVID-19 is low, and the risk of any child needing intensive care treatment is extremely low.

Serious illness and hospitalisation rates are low for children age 6 months to 4 years. But they are higher than in older children.

Children with certain health conditions are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/people-at-higher-risk/overview/#conditions-that-put-you-at-higher-risk>). They are more likely to have to go to hospital with COVID-19.

Sometimes, symptoms connected to COVID-19 can continue for some weeks or months. This is called 'long COVID' (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/long-covid/>). The risk of having this is lower in children compared to adults.

## PIMS or MIS-C

In rare cases, COVID-19 can cause a condition called paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS). PIMS is also known as multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C). It causes pneumonia, inflammation of the heart and difficulty breathing.

PIMS is more rarely seen following Omicron variant COVID-19 infection.

COVID-19 vaccination has been shown to reduce the risk of PIMS in older children and adolescents and a similar benefit is expected in children age 6 months to 4 years.

3 out of 4 children who develop PIMS or MIS-C have no underlying health condition. Most children with PIMS recover after time in hospital or intensive care. But some children have lasting side effects and a very small number can die.

This condition is known to affect children as young as 3 months.

#### ▼ Getting your child vaccinated if they had PIMS

If your child is age 6 months to 11 years and had PIMS, they can get a COVID-19 vaccine. They should wait until they have recovered and at least 90 days after they were diagnosed.

## Vaccine type

Your child will be offered the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/vaccine-types/>).

Children aged 5 and older may be offered the adapted Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for their first round of vaccination. The adapted vaccines work in the same way as the original Pfizer vaccine. But they are expected to give better protection against COVID-19, including the Omicron variant.

Adapted mRNA COVID-19 vaccines have been recommended for children aged 5 and older by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) in Ireland.

## Dose amount

The dose amount they are offered depends on their age.

Children aged:

- 12 to 17 are given the same dose amount as all people age 12 and older
- 5 to 11 are given a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine with a smaller dose
- 6 months to 4 years are given a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine with an even smaller dose

The immunity they get will be similar to the higher dose vaccine used in older age groups.

When your child will be due dose 2 or dose 3 (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/children/#doses-needed>)

## Vaccine safety

Clinical trials showed that this vaccine was highly effective at preventing COVID-19 in children.

### 6 months to 4 years

At least 1 dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (the same type as the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/vaccine-types/>)) has already been given to over 1 million children age 6 months to 4 years in the USA. Over 3,000 children have been vaccinated as part of clinical trials. No new safety concerns were reported in children age 6 months to 4 years after these trials.

### 5 to 11 years

This vaccine has been given to millions of children age 5 to 11 in the USA, Canada and Israel and is recommended in other European countries.

Thousands of people worldwide have been vaccinated as part of clinical trials. No new safety concerns were reported in children age 5 to 11 after these trials.

European Medicines Agency information about the Pfizer/BioNTech (Comirnaty) COVID-19 vaccine - [ema.europa.eu](https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/medicines/human/EPAR/comirnaty) (Link: <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/medicines/human/EPAR/comirnaty>)

It is expected that the safety of the adapted vaccines will be similar to the previous vaccines. The safety of COVID-19 vaccines will continue to be monitored by the EMA.

## Children who should not get a COVID-19 vaccine

Most children age 6 months and older will be able to safely get the vaccine.

But the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is not recommended if your child had a severe allergic reaction to:

- any of the ingredients in the vaccine, including polyethylene glycol (PEG)
- a previous dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine
- a previous dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine
- Trometamol (one of the contents in contrast dye used in MRI scans)

Talk to your child's GP before getting the vaccine if your child has had:

- a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) in the past, including to any other vaccine or medication
- myocarditis or pericarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) after a previous dose of any COVID-19 vaccine

Your GP will likely refer your child to a cardiologist (heart specialist).

## If your child is getting other vaccines

If your child under age 5 is getting their routine childhood vaccines (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/babies-children/vaccines-your-child/>), they should wait 14 days before getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

If your child recently had a COVID-19 infection (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/children/#if-your-child-recently-had-a-covid-19-infection>)

## Side effects in children

Vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild or moderate in children and do not last long. Side effects can include a sore arm, fever or tiredness.

Read about potential side effects after the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/side-effects/>)

## Myocarditis and pericarditis

In rare cases, people may develop myocarditis and pericarditis after getting the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Myocarditis and pericarditis are inflammatory heart conditions.

### [6 months to 11 years](#)

Myocarditis in children aged 6 months to 11 years is very rare.

In the USA, over a million doses of mRNA vaccines have been given to children in this age group. There have been no reports of myocarditis in these children.

We are still learning about the effectiveness and side effects of COVID-19 vaccines in this age group.

### [12 years and older](#)

Early data from other countries shows myocarditis is less likely in those age 12 to 15 than those aged 16 to 24.

The risk of these very rare conditions is higher in younger men. They are more likely to happen after the second dose and mostly happen within 14 days of getting the vaccine.

2 European studies have estimated the risk of myocarditis, after the second dose of the vaccine:

- 1 additional case for every 38,000 males age 12 to 29 (within 7 days)
- 1 additional case for every 17,500 males age 16 to 24 (within 28 days)

The risk of these rare side effects seems to be lower after the first booster.

### [Symptoms of myocarditis and pericarditis](#)

Even though these conditions are rare, you should know the signs to look out for in your child after vaccination.

Get medical help if your child gets any of these symptoms after their vaccine:

- breathlessness
- palpitations (a forceful heartbeat that may be irregular)
- chest pain

Signs of myocarditis in younger children may be more general including:

- irritability
- vomiting
- difficulty feeding
- rapid and shallow breathing
- fatigue

Most people recover from myocarditis and pericarditis on their own. But some may need treatment in hospital. We don't know yet if there are any long-term problems because of these side effects.

## If you decide not to get your child vaccinated

You may decide to wait until more information is available about COVID-19 vaccines in children before deciding to get a vaccine.

If you decide not to get your child vaccinated, there is a greater risk they could get COVID-19. Their symptoms will most likely be mild, but they will still need to isolate from others. This means they may miss school, childcare and other activities.

You will need to take extra care to protect your child against COVID-19 (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/preventing-the-spread/protecting-your-child/>).

## Different views between parents

Children under 16 will need the consent of one parent or legal guardian to get vaccinated.

If you're a parent or guardian and do not agree about getting your child vaccinated, discuss and try to resolve this between yourselves before booking an appointment for your child.

You can also talk to your child's GP about any concerns you may have about COVID-19 vaccines.

Talk to your child about vaccination as their opinion is important also.

If a vaccinator, including your GP or pharmacist, is notified that one parent or guardian does not consent to the child being vaccinated, the vaccine should not be given.

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This content was fact checked by vaccine experts working in Ireland.

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## More in [Getting your COVID-19 vaccine](#) (Link: </screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/>)

### Where to get vaccinated

About COVID-19 vaccination (Link: </screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/about-covid-19-vaccination/>)

Booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (Link: </screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/covid-19-vaccine-booster-dose/>)

Find a pharmacy giving COVID-19 vaccines (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/services/pharmacies-covid-19/>)

### Children

How to get a COVID-19 vaccine for children (Link: </screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/children/>)

Deciding on COVID-19 vaccination for children

Walk-in clinics for children (Link: </services/covid-19-vaccination-centres/>)

### Weak immune system

Weak immune system and COVID-19 vaccines (Link: </screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/weak-immune-system/>)

### **Pregnancy and breastfeeding**

Pregnancy, breastfeeding and fertility: COVID-19 vaccination (Link: </screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/pregnancy/>)