

# The Safety and Efficacy of COVID-19 Vaccines for Youth

Please read the Special Notice from the Eastern Ontario Health Unit regarding age eligibility on page 2.

Vaccines are safe, effective and the best way to protect your child and family from COVID-19, including highly contagious variants. While more and more people across Ontario are receiving their COVID-19 vaccines, we know you may have questions about the vaccine for youth aged 12-17. Here are answers to some of the commonly asked questions.

## 1. Isn't COVID-19 milder for children?

Children who get infected with COVID-19 typically experience mild symptoms, however others can get very sick, require hospitalization and experience more serious and longer-lasting symptoms. Children's mental health has also been impacted by COVID-19 – they've had to attend school remotely, miss out on extra-curricular activities, and spend extended amounts of time away from their friends and peers.

Getting youth vaccinated will provide them with a strong level of protection against COVID-19 and its variants, and support as safe a return to school as possible in September. It will also get them closer to the things they love doing like hanging out with friends, playing and watching sports, and volunteering. And it will help protect other family members too, such as those under 12 who can't get vaccinated yet, or older individuals who may have a lower immune response to the vaccines.

## 2. Why is the World Health Organization (WHO) not recommending COVID-19 vaccines for youth?

While the WHO has not yet made a general recommendation on vaccinating children and youth against COVID-19, their Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) has concluded that the Pfizer-

BioNTech vaccine is suitable for people aged 12 years and older.

Health Canada has one of the most rigorous scientific review systems in the world and only approves a vaccine if it is safe, it works, and meets the highest manufacturing and quality standards. Health Canada authorized the use of the Pfizer vaccine in children 12 to 15 years of age after completing a thorough and independent scientific review of the evidence and determining that the vaccine is safe and effective at preventing COVID-19 in youth. This is the first COVID-19 vaccine authorized in Canada for use in children and marks a significant milestone in Canada's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 3. What COVID-19 vaccine trials have been done on youth?

Only vaccines that Health Canada determines to be safe and effective following thorough review of evidence and rigorous safety, efficacy and quality requirements are approved for use in Canada and available in Ontario. In clinical trials, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has shown to be highly effective at protecting against COVID-19 for individuals aged 12 and over. Continued monitoring of clinical trial participants is also underway to ensure the vaccine continues to work and is safe.

**4. Shouldn't I wait until more data comes out, the WHO endorses youth vaccinations and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gives full approval on COVID-19 vaccines for youth?**

Getting vaccinated is the most important thing you can do to protect your family, friends and community against COVID-19. The vaccine is safe and effective for youth aged 12 to 17, is manufactured to the highest quality and prepares the immune system to fight against COVID-19. Both the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends COVID-19 vaccination for those 12 years of age and older. And, millions of children aged 12 to 17 in the United States have received the Pfizer vaccine without any serious side effects.

**5. Are the long-term effects of the COVID-19 vaccine for children determined?**

The benefits of getting vaccinated and being protected against COVID-19 outweigh the risks of potential long-term side effects from the vaccine. COVID-19 infection is much more likely to cause longer-lasting symptoms and health problems in some people, including children.

**6. How common is myocarditis and/or pericarditis in youth?**

A small number of cases of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and/or pericarditis (inflammation of lining outside the heart) following vaccination have been reported. Most cases occurred in young adult males under 30 years of age after the second dose of vaccine, and most had mild illness and recovered quickly.

**7. How do you know that the COVID-19 vaccine won't impact my child's fertility?**

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccine causes male or female infertility.

**8. Won't the COVID-19 vaccine put my child at risk for an allergic reaction?**

Serious allergic reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine are very rare. To be safe, everyone who gets vaccinated is monitored for at least 15 minutes in case an allergic reaction occurs. COVID-19 vaccines do not contain eggs, gelatin (pork), gluten, latex, preservatives, antibiotics or aluminum. Those who have a known allergic reaction to one of the ingredients in the Pfizer vaccine or to a previous dose of the vaccine should see an allergist/immunologist before getting vaccinated.



**Special Notice from the Eastern Ontario Health Unit Regarding Age Eligibility**

The government of Ontario has extended eligibility to the Pfizer vaccine to children born in 2009. Ontario has closely monitored data from Alberta and British Columbia in making this decision, and these provinces have offered the Pfizer vaccine to youth born in 2009 for several months with no risks identified. As of August 18, 2021, all children turning 12 years old before the end of 2021 are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

The information provided in this resource applies to youth born in 2009 or before.