

Immunization Facts for Families

COVID-19

Updated September 3, 2026

Millions of children and teens have received COVID vaccines. The COVID vaccine helps prevent illness or reduce symptoms, so kids can focus on growing up happy and healthy.

Getting the COVID vaccine can keep your family healthy and:

- Prevent COVID-19 disease
- Reduce the severity of COVID symptoms
- Reduce the number of sick days or missed activities from COVID
- Lower children's risk of hospitalization and death from COVID
- Prevent long COVID in children

Under 2 years old

45%

of all children hospitalized for COVID were 6–23 months old. **<5% of those children were up to date on COVID vaccination**

5–17 year olds

56%

of COVID-19-related emergency department and urgent care visits **prevented by vaccines.**

Certain people are at higher risk for severe COVID than others, including children under age 2 years. Studies of children who were hospitalized with COVID showed about 45% were only 6 to 23 months old. Fewer than 5% of those children were up to date on COVID vaccination. For children ages 5–17 years, COVID vaccination is estimated to prevent up to 56% of emergency and urgent care visits. While the vaccine doesn't prevent every case, it does prepare your child's immune system to respond right away and more effectively.

Who should receive the COVID vaccine?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends the COVID vaccine for:

- All children ages 6 months through 23 months because they are at high risk for severe COVID illness and hospitalization
- Children and teens ages 2 through 18 years with these risk factors:
 - Health conditions that increase their risk of severe COVID
 - Living in long-term care facilities or other group settings
 - Never having been vaccinated against COVID
 - Having household contacts who are at high risk for severe COVID



The AAP also recommends the COVID vaccine for children who are not in these risk groups if their parent or guardian wants them to have protection.

Who is at greatest risk of complications from COVID?

The COVID emergency is over, but the virus is still around. It's difficult to predict who will get seriously ill from it. Respiratory illnesses can be especially risky for infants and toddlers, whose airways and lungs are small and still developing. We also know that infants and toddlers, older people, and people with certain medical conditions (for example, obesity, heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, etc) are more likely to end up in the hospital from it. Kids who are immunized can play with their baby siblings and visit their grandparents without worry.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Most children have no side effects after COVID vaccination. If side effects happen, they are usually mild and short-lived, such as pain or swelling at the injection site, headache, chills, or a low fever.

Rarely, heart swelling has been reported after COVID vaccination in adolescents and young adults. This risk is up to six times higher after getting COVID than after vaccination. If you have concerns, talk with your child's pediatrician.



Learn more

If you have questions about vaccines and keeping your child healthy, talk with your pediatrician. Visit www.healthychildren.org/covid-19 for more information on COVID vaccines from the AAP. View and download AAP Immunization Fact Sheets at www.aap.org/IZFactSheets.

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