

Children with Complex Health Needs, the COVID-19 Vaccine, and Back to School Boosters

Family & Caregiver FAQ

All children ages 6 months and older, including those with complex health needs, are eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine. This vaccine is typically given in two or three doses over several weeks. Currently, children ages five and older are also eligible to receive a COVID-19 booster shot.

The vaccine and booster shots are safe, effective, and free. You don't need identification or insurance to get them. The following questions have been asked by local parents and caregivers of children with complex health needs.



Why should I consider getting my child with complex health needs vaccinated?

- Children with complex health needs are more likely to become sick with COVID-19 than children without complex health needs.
- The vaccine reduces the risk of getting COVID-19 infection.
- Vaccinated people who become infected with COVID-19 are less likely to spread, have serious complications or die from COVID-19. This is especially true for those with chronic health conditions.

Why should I consider getting my child a COVID-19 booster shot this summer or fall as school resumes?

- Vaccines and boosters have been shown to be very safe and effective for children, including those with complex health needs.
- Boosters provide increased protection and decrease the likelihood of infection, illness, and missed school.
- Children who received their initial vaccine doses in the winter or spring have waning immunity entering the school year and fall viral season.
- Though many kids may have had COVID at some point, the immunity afterwards is short lived and incomplete protection.
- COVID immunity throughout the community will prevent further outbreaks and disruptions to schools.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe and effective for children with complex health needs?

- Available data on billions of doses provided around the world indicate that the COVID-19 vaccine is effective at preventing severe illness.
- Local and systemic reactions following the vaccine are less common in children aged 5-11 compared to young adults aged 12-25.
- It is currently unknown whether there are differences in vaccine effectiveness or side effects for children with complex health needs.

- While the risk of a child having a serious reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine is very low, one rare complication is inflammation of the heart muscle, or myocarditis. Children are still more likely to get myocarditis from the COVID-19 infection than from the vaccine.
- For more information on COVID-19 and the vaccine, see guidance by the American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>

I've decided to get my child with complex health needs vaccinated. What should I expect after they receive each dose?

- Shortly after your child gets the vaccine, they may experience mild side effects, such as pain or swelling where the vaccine was given (typically the arm). Some children may have headache, fatigue, chills, or fever though those side effects are less likely in children than adults. Many children have no noticeable side effects after getting their COVID vaccine. Severe side effects are very rare.

How is the COVID-19 vaccine different from other vaccines, like the flu or chicken pox?

- The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines rely on messenger RNA (mRNA).
- mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that will trigger an immune response inside our bodies.
- While mRNA vaccines are newly available to the public, researchers have been studying and working with mRNA vaccines for decades.

Were children with complex health needs included in the COVID-19 vaccine trials?

- 20% of children included in the initial vaccine trials had coexisting conditions which increased their risk for severe COVID-19 disease. This includes children with complex health needs or rare diseases.
- Many systems are in place to monitor for vaccine complications among the millions of children who have already received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Should I wait to vaccinate my child with complex health needs until more studies have been done?

- Children with complex health needs are at increased risk for severe illness and hospitalization from COVID-19. The vaccine has been shown to provide protection from these risks.
- In general, conditions which contribute to medical complexity, such as congenital heart disease and neurologic disorders, do not increase a child's risk for complications from the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Questions about individual situations should be addressed with the child's provider.

Are there any concerns about vaccinating a child who relies on specific medications to manage a complex health condition?

- Medications are very unlikely to increase any risks associated with vaccination.
- Some medicines that suppress the body's immune system or treat autoimmune disorders may reduce vaccine effectiveness.
- Questions about specific medications should be addressed with the child's provider.



How do I get my homebound child vaccinated?

- Contact your local health department to learn more about vaccination options for homebound children.

Visit these resources to learn more!

General information on vaccinating children ages 5-11 (Wisconsin Department of Human Services):

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/vaccine.htm>

Find a vaccination site near you (Center for Disease Control): <https://www.vaccines.gov/search/>

Resources related to the Safe Return to School for Children with Complex Health Needs: <https://reset4kids.org/>