

# COVID-19 Vaccines for Youth (ages 12 to 17)



## Should youth get the COVID-19 vaccine? If so, which vaccines can they get?

- Yes. Health Canada has approved the use of mRNA vaccines for youth ages 12 to 17 years, which includes the Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine and the Moderna Spikevax COVID-19 vaccine<sup>1,2,3</sup>. If a choice of vaccine is available, it is recommended that individuals ages 12 to 29 years receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine over the Moderna Spikevax vaccine to further minimize the risk of rare side effects following vaccination<sup>1,4,5</sup>.

## Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for youth?

- Yes. Health Canada has approved the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna Spikevax vaccines for individuals ages 12 to 17 years and has determined that these vaccines are very safe for youth and do not cause any serious side effects<sup>6,7</sup>. Youth appear to have a very good immune response following COVID-19 vaccination, which results in strong protection against COVID-19<sup>7</sup>. Research and surveillance continue to show that the mRNA vaccines are safe for youth<sup>8</sup>.

## How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine for youth?

- Clinical trials demonstrated that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was 100% effective in protecting youth ages 12 to 15 years from COVID-19 one week after receiving their second dose<sup>2</sup>. For individuals 16 years of age and older, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was about 95% effective one week following their second dose<sup>2</sup>.
- The Moderna vaccine was 100% effective in protecting participants 12 to 17 years of age two weeks after their second dose<sup>3</sup>.

## Why do youth need the COVID-19 vaccine if they are less likely to get very sick from COVID-19?

- Although youth typically experience mild symptoms from COVID-19 infection and are less likely to have severe outcomes, some individuals who contract COVID-19 may require hospitalization or experience long-term effects such as fatigue, difficulty breathing or muscle aches<sup>9</sup>. Youth may also be asymptomatic and capable of spreading the virus to other populations who may be at greater risk, such as immunocompromised individuals or seniors<sup>1</sup>. It is essential that youth are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 to protect themselves and others in their community against COVID-19 infection<sup>9</sup>.

## How many doses do youth need?

- Youth 12 to 17 years of age should receive two doses of an mRNA vaccine, as well as a booster dose<sup>9</sup>. Youth should receive their second dose at least 8 weeks after their first dose and may receive a booster dose at least six months after their second dose<sup>9</sup>. A third dose plus a booster dose is recommended for youth who have weakened immune systems due to medical conditions<sup>10</sup>. It is also safe to mix-and-match Pfizer and Moderna vaccine doses as they are interchangeable<sup>11</sup>.

## What are the side effects of COVID-19 vaccination for youth?

- Youth typically experience mild side effects from vaccination, such as redness, soreness and swelling at the site of injection<sup>1,2,3</sup>. They may also experience chills, fatigue, joint pain, headache, fever, and muscle aches<sup>1,2,3</sup>. Youth may experience some side effects more often, such as headaches, chills and fever<sup>10</sup>. Side effects that do occur are typically mild and clear up within a few days<sup>1,2,4</sup>.
- Cases of myocarditis, which is inflammation of the heart and cases of pericarditis, which is inflammation of the thin tissue surrounding the heart, following vaccination with mRNA COVID-19 vaccines have been reported but are very rare in youth and occur less often with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine compared to the Moderna Spikevax vaccine<sup>1</sup>.

## Can the COVID-19 vaccination affect puberty or fertility in youth?

- No. There is no evidence that suggests the COVID-19 vaccines affect puberty or fertility in youth<sup>5,8</sup>.

## Can youth consent to vaccination themselves?

- If an individual is 12 years of age or older and capable of providing informed consent, parental consent may not be required to accept or refuse COVID-19 vaccination<sup>10</sup>. Informed consent involves understanding the purpose of the vaccine, why it is recommended and the benefits and risks of accepting or refusing vaccination<sup>10</sup>. If an individual is incapable of providing consent, they will need consent from a parent or legal guardian<sup>7</sup>.

## What if I have more questions about COVID-19 vaccination for youth?

- Parents and caregivers who have questions about COVID-19 vaccination for youth can also visit [www.sickkids.ca/vaccineconsult](http://www.sickkids.ca/vaccineconsult) or call toll-free at 1-888-304-6558 to book a phone appointment with a SickKids clinician<sup>12</sup>.
- This service is available in multiple languages with the support of an interpreter on the call. You can also speak to your family physician if you have any questions or concerns regarding COVID-19 vaccination for youth.

# References

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