



COVID-19 vaccination for children aged 5 to 11



Is the vaccination effective and safe for children?

Only Pfizer/BioNTech's mRNA vaccine for children is recommended for vaccinating children from age 5 to 11. This vaccine has a lower dosage than the one for adolescents and adults.

Swissmedic, the Swiss agency for the authorisation and supervision of therapeutic products, has closely examined and approved the vaccine for children. It is very effective and safe. Thousands of children have received the vaccine in the course of trials. Side-effects were rather less frequent than in adolescents and adults. More than 6 million children in the United States have already been vaccinated with at least one dose. The data currently available confirm the efficacy and safety of the vaccine. New data are being collected and reviewed by experts on an ongoing basis.

Here you will find more detailed information on how the vaccination works: www.foph-coronavirus.ch/mrna

What children is the vaccination recommended for?

We recommend COVID-19 vaccination for children aged 5 to 11 whose parents/guardians want it for their child after an individual assessment of the risks and benefits.

This recommendation applies particularly to

- a) Children whose health is already severely impaired because of a chronic illness, in order to if possible prevent any additional illness/infection.
- b) Children who are close contacts (household members) of people who cannot get sufficient protection with the vaccination (for example because they have a weakened immune system).

What are the benefits of the vaccination for children?

- Very good individual protection against COVID-19:
An infection with the coronavirus in children is almost always mild and without complications. But in rare cases it can lead to serious complications¹ involving hospitalisation in children of this age too.
Not only that, but in rare cases infection can lead to long-lasting health impairments (long-term effects of COVID-19) such as fatigue and shortness of breath, even in children. For children whose health is already severely impaired by chronic illness, additional infection/illness should be prevented as far as possible. However, even if they have a chronic illness, children are not in the group of people at particularly high risk from coronavirus. If you're uncertain you can consult your paediatrician for advice.
- Influence on social and mental wellbeing:
Vaccination can help reduce the negative consequences of measures such as isolation and quarantine and avoid the effects of frequent contact with people who might be

infected, for example at school or during free time. This is of the utmost importance, especially for children.

- Temporary protection from transmission of the virus:
Current data indicate that transmission of the virus can be reduced for a certain period of time (a few months) after full vaccination. This means vaccination may make sense for children who are close contacts (household members) of people who cannot get sufficient protection with the vaccination (for example because they have a weakened immune system). Vaccinating children in general can also do something to reduce the transmission of the virus in their immediate environment.

What are the risks of the vaccination for children?

So far there not so much experience has been gained with the COVID-19 vaccination for children as for adults. No noticeable problems with serious side effects have been observed in trials or among the 6 million-plus children who have been vaccinated so far. However, on the basis of the available data, possible rare side effects cannot yet be ruled out with certainty. Such side effects could be expected to emerge within a few weeks or months of the vaccination.

New data are being added all the time, and experts are closely monitoring the situation and adjusting the recommendations as needed.

How do I assess the risks and benefits for my child?

An individual assessment of the benefits and risks should help you make a decision for or against the recommended COVID-19 vaccination. If the benefits outweigh the risks, this argues in favour of COVID-19 vaccination; if the benefits don't outweigh the risks, this argues more against vaccination. You should think about whether the vaccination makes sense specifically for your child. It can be helpful to ask the following questions:

- What is their personal situation?
- How is your child's health?
- How are the people close to your child doing?
- What's your child's day-to-day (school) situation?
- What are your child's wishes and fears in terms of COVID-19 and the vaccination?

An individual assessment also includes deciding whether to have your child vaccinated now or not until later on. Vaccination of children aged 5 to 11 years will have only a limited effect on the circulation of the current Delta variant in the population.

Which children should not have the vaccination?

We do not recommend COVID-19 vaccination with an mRNA vaccine for the following children:

¹ e.g. PIMS (paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome), a severe inflammatory reaction from the body (cf. FAQ on *What is PIMS?*)



- Children with a severe, confirmed allergy to an ingredient of the vaccines, particularly polyethylene glycol (PEG) or tromethamine (TRIS).

Please note: If your child has a high temperature or is feeling ill or unwell, postpone their vaccination.

If you're waiting for a COVID-19 test result or your child is in isolation or quarantine, don't take them for the vaccination now but get them vaccinated at a later date.

Should I get my child vaccinated if they've already been infected with the coronavirus?

The vaccination is only recommended for children who have already had a coronavirus infection if they belong to groups a) or b) mentioned above. No vaccination is currently recommended for any other children who have recovered from COVID-19.

However, from a medical point of view it is safe to vaccinate a child who has already had an (undetected) infection.

If your child has a weakened immune system (because of an illness or therapy), discuss what to do with your paediatrician.

Where can I get my child vaccinated?

The cantons are responsible for vaccination. Find out from your canton's website or infoline (www.foph-coronavirus.ch/cantons) where you can get your child vaccinated. Or you can ask your paediatrician.

What does the vaccination involve?

Your child receives an injection in the upper arm. After the first injection your child remains at the vaccination centre for another 15 minutes for observation.

How many injections does my child have to have?

Usually two vaccinations are required. Your child can receive the second injection about four weeks after the first. Currently booster vaccinations are not recommended for children. There is still too little data on the length of time the vaccination provides protection and on the benefits of boosters for this age group.

Are there any side effects?

Side effects can occur with any vaccination. They are usually mild to moderate and pass quickly. Serious side effects occur very rarely. Some individuals have suffered a severe allergic reaction directly after being vaccinated for COVID-19 with an mRNA vaccine. In very rare cases, inflammation of the heart muscle or the pericardium has been observed in people aged 12 and over in the 14 days after the vaccination. Most of these cases were mild and could be treated effectively. It is still not clear whether this risk also exists for children from 5 to 11. So far there has been too little data available for this age group. Among adolescents and adults, inflammation of the heart muscle or pericardium occurs much more frequently after infection with the coronavirus than after vaccination.

Besides that, there have so far been no noticeable problems with serious side effects in adults, adolescents and children. Such side effects could be expected to emerge within a few months of the vaccination. Experts are keeping a close eye on potential indications.

What side effects are possible?

- The place on the arm where your child received the injection can become inflamed, painful or swollen.
- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Muscle and joint pains
- General symptoms such as shivering, feeling feverish or a mild fever
- Diarrhoea, vomiting

These side effects are common after a vaccination. Since they indicate that the body is building up protection against the disease, they are a good sign when they are mild.

An allergic reaction is typically associated with severe swelling, redness, itching or shortness of breath immediately after the injection. Typical symptoms of heart muscle inflammation are chest pain, shortness of breath and palpitations. Consult your paediatrician immediately if your child experiences such symptoms.

How long can side effects last?

The side effects usually disappear within a few days. If your child is still experiencing side effects after a week, or if they get worse or cause you concern, talk to your paediatrician.

How can I prepare my child for the vaccination?

Explain to your child what will happen when they go to get vaccinated and what to expect from the vaccination. Be positive and talk about the way the vaccination can protect your child from the virus. Bring something that calms and distracts your child, for example a cuddly animal, book or toy. It helps to remain relaxed throughout the entire process and answer your child's questions honestly. Encourage your child to ask questions.

Giving painkillers before the vaccination to avoid side effects is not recommended.

Can my child have the COVID-19 vaccination at the same time as other vaccinations?

Yes, your child can have the COVID-19 vaccination at the same time as other vaccinations. The side effects that can be expected are similar.

Where can I find further information?

You will find further information on COVID-19 vaccination on the FOPH website: www.foph-coronavirus.ch/vaccination Or you can ask your paediatrician.

