COVID-19 Vaccinations in Children: Answering parents questions

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This flyer was created to answer questions from parents about COVID-19 vaccines for children. Currently the vaccine is recommended for all children aged 12 years or older. Some children, aged 5 - 11 years, can also get the vaccine.

How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

Vaccines train our immune systems to defend the body against a virus/bacteria, without having to be exposed to the disease.

The COVID-19 vaccines teach cells to produce part of the protein from the outside of the virus (the spike protein). This triggers the immune system to be ready to attack the COVID-19 virus.

Because cells only make this spike protein, and not the whole virus, you can't get or spread COVID-19 from the vaccine.

Which children can get the vaccine?

Everyone aged 12 and over, and some children aged 5 to 11 years, can get a first and second dose of the covid vaccine.

People aged 16 and over, and some children aged 12 to 15, can also get a booster dose of the vaccine.

You can book your COVID-19 vaccination appointments online now, find out more about walk-in centres or your child may be able to get the vaccine at school.

Are there any side effects?

The most common side effects are mild and last less than a week. After the vaccine you might:

- have a sore arm where you had the injection
- feel tired
- have a headache
- feel achy
- feel or be sick

Lina, Church Street Community and Maternity Champion, shared her experience of getting the vaccine on YouTube.

Have the vaccines been tested enough? Are they safe?

Yes. The vaccines have gone through the normal rigorous testing. They have passed trials in animals and humans (stages I, II and III).

As well as having more resources to develop a vaccine for COVID-19, other changes helped to speed the process up. For example, phases of the trials overlapped rather than happening one after the other and the regulator assessed data from the scientists as soon as it was available not all together at the end.

Over 3 million first doses of covid vaccines have been given to under 18s in the UK. Serious side effects are extremely rare, with most just experiencing a sore arm for a few days.

What's in the vaccine?

The vaccines don't contain any animal products, including egg. They are suitable for vegetarians. They do not contain any foetal material.

You can find the full list of ingredients for the Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca/Oxford, Spikevax (formerly Moderna) and Janssen vaccines, with these links to the patient information leaflets.

Is the vaccine safe if my child has an underlying health condition?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccines are safe for people with underlying health conditions.

The AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine team found that people with underlying health conditions were not more likely to have adverse effects.

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My child has allergies. Should they still get the vaccine?

For most people with allergies, yes. If you've had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) before, you should tell the healthcare staff before getting the vaccine.

Only people who've had allergic reactions to the specific ingredients in the vaccine are advised not to have it, e.g. to polyethylene glycol (PEG) for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

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Which vaccine is the most effective?

Research has shown all the vaccines being used in the UK all provide effective protection from:

- getting seriously ill or dying from COVID-19
- getting symptoms of COVID-19
- catching and spreading COVID-19

Should I prioritise the covid vaccine over other childhood imunisations?

The routine childhood vaccinations are extremely important. However there is no need to prioritise one vaccine over another.
You should ensure your child receives their routine vaccinations as scheduled; having the covid vaccine around the time of the other vaccines has no negative effects.

How do the risks of vaccination compare to the risks of COVID-19?

So far, billions of people have been given a COVID-19 vaccine and reports of serious side effects, such as allergic reactions, have been very rare.

On the other hand the risks of getting seriously ill with COVID-19 are very real. Some people can also suffer from long covid, where the effects of the illness can last months after the initial infection.

Having the COVID-19 vaccine reduces the chance of you getting seriously ill or dying from COVID-19.

If my child has a bad reaction to the first dose, should they get the second?

The Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca/Oxford and Moderna vaccines need at least 2 doses in order to get the most protection. You should get the second dose even if you have side effects after the first dose, unless a vaccination provider or your doctor tells you not to get it.

Contact your GP or 111 if the redness or tenderness where you got the injection gets worse after 24 hours, if your side effects have not gone away after a few days or if you are worried.

Further information:

1. NHS webpage on coronavirus vaccines
2. NHS and Public Health England Leaflet for after first vaccine dose, answering common questions
3. WHO webpage answering COVID-19 questions
4. COVID-19 vaccination information for public health professionals (green book chapter 14a)
5. Governmental webpage on COVID-19 rules and guidance.
6. BBC videos explaining the COVID-19 vaccines in Sylheti, Gujarati, Tamil, Urdu and Punjabi.