

COVID shots for Kids under 5

For the many parents who have been anxiously waiting, COVID vaccinations for children 6 months to 5 years will finally be starting early next week, 18 months after the first adult shots were given. While children were less affected by the earlier versions of COVID, the Omicron variants have been different. While Omicron may be milder for adults, it is hitting younger children harder. Public health measures, such as mask mandates, also helped protect young children, but we are now seeing a sharp increase in number of young children being hospitalized. Young children are also at risk for Multi-system Inflammatory Syndrome, a rare but serious complication of COVID infections. They can also have prolonged symptoms and post-COVID syndrome. Being able to finally get these vulnerable children vaccinated will be a relief for many families.

Moderna, the vaccine that has been approved for these children, is exactly the same vaccine we have used for almost 2 years now, but at a lower and slightly less concentrated dose. On top of all the information and experience we have from the adults and older children; this vaccine has had further testing in young children to make sure that the dose was safe and effective.

Children under 5 will still only need 2 shots of the lower 25 mcg dose. The adult dose is 100 mcg for the first 2 shots, while older children and adult booster doses are 50 mcg. The minimum interval between doses is 4 weeks, but evidence has shown that increasing this interval to 8 weeks can help the shots work better and may decrease side effects. Children who are immunocompromised will need 3 shots and may get their second one after 4 weeks.

No new side effects have been found, although crying and irritability are more common in this age group. Having a sore arm is the most common side effect followed by being tired or sleepier, which can last for a day or 2. Fever is slightly more common than in adults. A dose of Tylenol can help manage most of the common side effects along with rest and a few cuddles. Severe allergic reactions have been extremely rare, especially in children who have not had anaphylaxis before. Myocarditis is extremely rare in this age group. Only a handful of cases have been reported in children under 12 and none in children under 5.

Shots will be available by appointment through your local Family Doctor's office, since most parents have said that they would prefer this. For those without a doctor, you can also book a shot on the provincial website for your child at specific kid's clinics in Belleville and at some local pharmacies. We will also have some appointments available at the Picton vaccination clinic for those under 5. Updates will be posted on the County and PEFHT social media if and when other options become available.

For now, Moderna is the only option available for children under 5. The 3 shot Pfizer vaccine may be approved by the fall and the updated COVID vaccines may be available for booster doses in the new year.

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