Vaccinating kids is good for everyone.

The first COVID wave seemed to leave children largely unaffected. Their infections, mostly asymptomatic went unnoticed and undiagnosed. While other activities were cancelled and COVID decimated our seniors, schools stayed open. Things have markedly changed since then, and we are now looking a vastly different picture. Vaccinations are extremely successful in protecting our most vulnerable, but the new variants of concern are hitting younger people harder and harder. Children do get sick with COVID, they get hospitalized and some of them die. Complications of COVID including multi-system inflammatory syndrome, Long COVID and other organ damage last weeks, some may be life-long.   All children have suffered some degree of emotional, social and educational harm this past year which may negatively affect their ongoing development. This type of stress is well known to contribute to future physical and mental health problems. While they remain unvaccinated, children, and their families will continue to struggle.

The Pfizer mRNA vaccine has now been approved for children 12 – 15 years of age. During clinical trials it was 100 % effective at preventing COVID. Building on the adult data helped speed up these trials, but the safety and efficacy specifically in adolescents had to be reconfirmed. More than 3 million teenagers have now been safely vaccinated. Children's immune systems are generally stronger and more reactive than older adults, so vaccinations in childhood are often more effective and longer lasting. However, this robust immune response may cause slightly more minor side effects such as injection site pain, fever, chills, head and muscle aches and general flu-like symptoms. There was no increase in the rate of severe side effects, like anaphylaxis. These vaccines have no direct effect on puberty hormones, nor will they prevent pregnancy – despite information circulating on social media.

Young people can independently consent to being vaccinated. Many are excited and eager so they can get back to school, sports and spending time with their friends. However, many are also anxious and some fearful of the actual injection. There are many excellent resources available to help teens and eventually younger children prepare for their vaccination. This website is a good place to start - https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/card. With the hot days, more people are feeling faint before, during or after their vaccine, something that is quite common in young healthy people. Eating and drinking before you come for a vaccination can help but there is always someone available at the clinic to help if you feel unwell.

Getting kids vaccinated gets them back to the social, physical and educational activities which are essential for healthy growth and development.   It decreases COVID transmission, making our community safer for all.   Decades of data shows that vaccinating children protects seniors and those not able to be vaccinated. Leaving any large portion of our population unvaccinated increases all our risks. It allows COVID to spread and mutate, creating even stronger and more dangerous variants. Vaccinating our higher risk population has helped flatten the curve, but if we ever want to eliminate it, we need to vaccinate **everyone** as soon as possible.

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