

COVID-19 Vaccine for Kids: A Guide for Parents




COVID-19 Vaccine Fast Facts

Getting the COVID-19 vaccine is our best shot at fighting the pandemic. As you consider the COVID-19 vaccine and your child, here are some things to keep in mind:

- **The vaccine is safe.** Even before the FDA emergency use authorization, clinical trials showed the COVID-19 vaccines to be remarkably safe and effective for children and teenagers. These vaccines continue to be monitored. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said that COVID-19 vaccines will have “the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history.”
- **The vaccine helps prevent children from becoming sick with COVID-19.** Although many children do not become severely ill with COVID-19, each day Inova L.J. Murphy Children’s Hospital and children’s hospitals across the country are caring for children with COVID-19 in our intensive care units, inpatient care spaces and emergency departments. After vaccination, your child has much less of a chance of getting COVID-19. And if they do get infected with the virus, including the more contagious Delta variant, they likely will not be as sick as they would be without the vaccine.
- **The vaccine helps prevent other complications related to COVID-19.** In addition to risks associated with COVID-19, children are at risk for multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), a serious condition that can affect children in the weeks and months after they have been infected with COVID-19. Children with MIS-C may require intensive care or develop long-lasting symptoms that affect their health and well-being.
- **The vaccine helps reduce the spread of COVID-19.** We are also learning that children are much better at spreading COVID-19 than public health messaging indicated earlier in the pandemic, which is why it is so important for children to get vaccinated to protect against the COVID-19 virus. Like adults, children can spread the virus, even when they have no symptoms.
- **The vaccine is a step toward returning to normal life.** Vaccination allows families and children to start getting back to participating in the activities that we enjoy, like sports and sleepovers.
- **Vaccination helps protect the community.** Even with the approval of the vaccine for children over 5 years old, there is still a population of younger children who cannot be vaccinated and others who cannot be vaccinated due to medical reasons. Protecting your child is also a step toward stopping the spread of COVID-19 and protecting the entire community.

How does the vaccine work? According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the COVID-19 vaccine works similarly to other vaccines your child has had. Germs such as SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, invade and multiply inside the body. The vaccine helps stop this by teaching the immune system to recognize and make antibodies to fight the virus.



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Helping Kids Through Vaccines

Here are some expert tips on how to get your kids and teens ready for the best possible vaccine experience.

Preparation

When kids know what to expect, they cope so much better with tests and procedures. You might be wondering, “Where do I even start?” We are here to help!

- **Timing:** In general, the older the kids or teens are, the more notice they will need. It’s important to tell teens days, or even weeks, before their vaccine. Older school-age children benefit from a couple days’ notice. Younger kids need to know a day before, and toddlers benefit from a heads up the morning of their vaccine, while they are still at home. This gives kids the time that they need, based on their age, to process the information, ask questions and come up with their coping plan.
- **Explain the why:** When we need to do tough things, we have to know why we’re doing it, and kids are no different. Saying things like, *“We need to get this vaccine because it’s going to help us stay healthy, and keep our family and friends healthy”* can really help kids understand why this is so important.
- **Choose your words:** It’s essential that we are honest with kids when explaining things, and there are great ways to help soften your language. Try “poke” instead of “shot/needle.” And if kids ask if it’s going to hurt, a great response is, *“You might feel a pinch, but there are some things that we can do to help with that.”* More on pain management down below.
- **Explain duration:** Luckily, vaccines are pretty quick, so we can tell kids things like, *“It will take just a couple of seconds for the actual poke. Let’s count to three and see how quick that is.”*
- **Offer choices:** Kids who feel like they are in control cope much better with procedures, and they actually even report less pain. Look for all of the opportunities to give kids choices around the experience. Examples can be, *“Do you want to do it in your left arm or your right arm?” “Do you want to sit on my lap, or do you want me to stand next to you?” “Do you want to watch or look away?”* and *“Would you like us to count or just do it?”*

- **Make a game plan (and practice it):** One of the most important pieces of preparing kids for procedures is coming up with a coping plan. This gives them some control and conveys that there are things that we can do to make it better. It’s another great opportunity to provide choices. Examples include, *“How about if we try some deep breathing? Let’s take some slow, deep breaths into our bellies together now to try it out.”* or, *“Would you like to pick out a video to watch on the phone or the tablet while you get your vaccine?”*
- **Plan a reward:** Even if it’s as simple as getting a milkshake or being able to pick out what movie to watch later, it’s great to have something to look forward to.



Here is a video that goes into more detail about preparing your kids for procedures:



Pain Management

Fear of needle pain can make kids (and adults!) really anxious and distressed, which can make getting a vaccine traumatic. The good news is, there are so many things that we can do to help reduce and eliminate pain from needle pokes. Here are some fantastic pain management strategies and tools:

- **Buzzy:** Buzzy is a vibrating device that creates a traffic jam to your brain, so it doesn't feel the poke so much. We have Buzzy at our vaccine clinics, and you can also buy your own online.
- **Shotblocker:** Shotblocker is a plastic device with little "nubs" that distract your nerves. Your brain feels the nubs, and not the poke. We have Shotblocker at our vaccine clinics, and you can also buy your own online.
- **Cold spray:** Cold spray acts like ice to numb the skin, so you don't feel the poke so much. We have cold spray at our vaccine clinics, and you can also buy your own online.
- **Topical numbing cream:** Numbing cream, like LMX (4% lidocaine cream) does a great job numbing the area where we are getting a vaccine. This needs to be applied at least 30 minutes before the vaccine, and it's best to put it on multiple spots, to give the

nurse options for the vaccine site. The key to this is rubbing in a small amount, then putting a very large glob on top, and covering the entire area with a clear dressing (or even wrapping it with plastic wrap). You can get numbing cream over the counter at pharmacies or online.

Here's a video that explains a little more about these options.

<https://youtu.be/THnxeLIBFGs>



Another key part of managing pain is understanding how it works. This is a fantastic video that helps kids understand how pain works in the brain and how they can take control of their pain experience.

We hope that this information is helpful in making any vaccine experience as comfortable as possible. If you have questions about how to support kids and teens through medical experiences, feel free to submit a question on our website at www.inova.org/askcl.

Where to
go to get the
COVID-19
vaccine

Vaccinating to protect kids from COVID-19 is a community effort. Below is a list of vaccine sources within the region:

- Your trusted pediatrician's office
- The Inova Children's Vaccine Clinic at Inova Center for Personalized Health
- Mass vaccination centers hosted by the Virginia Department of Health
- Many local pharmacies