

November 24, 2021

Dear parents and guardians:

COVID-19 continues to cause pressures on our health care system, and has challenged our work, social and recreational activities, particularly for families with young children. I know that the pandemic has impacted children in many difficult ways, and now that Health Canada has approved the Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) COVID-19 vaccine made for young children aged 5 to 11 years, you may have questions about this vaccine. I want to share some information as you consider the option of immunization for your children.

In recent months, I have heard from parents who are concerned their young children have not yet been eligible for vaccine protection from COVID-19. I have also heard from parents who are worried about whether the vaccine is safe for their young children. As a parent of young children myself, I know that all of us want to make the best choices to protect our families.

### **What we know about the vaccines for children**

Health Canada approval for younger children was based on a clinical trial involving over 3,000 young children receiving the Pfizer vaccine. This study found that vaccine efficacy (protection level) against symptomatic COVID-19 was 90.7%. This is similar to the level of protection that the vaccines provide for older children and adults. The study also showed that if immunized children did get infected, they experienced milder illness. While some children in the study experienced mild vaccine reactions like a sore arm or fever, there were no safety issues found.

### **Vaccine safety**

Ensuring COVID-19 vaccine safety is critically important. We closely watch for reports of adverse events following immunization (AEFIs) in Alberta, the rest of Canada, and around the world. For a summary of all AEFIs in Alberta to date, you can go to the [COVID-19 statistics on vaccination](#). Adverse events do happen, but they are very rare. Of 6,796,955 doses administered in Alberta to date, across all ages, there have been 2,005 AEFIs, or 0.03%.

### **Informed decision making**

Whether to vaccinate your children is an important choice. I encourage you to base your decision on the available evidence after weighing the benefits and risks.

Although the risk of severe disease, hospitalization and death due to COVID-19 is low for children aged 5 to 11, I hope that you will consider the following benefits of immunization:

- Vaccinating young children will protect other family members, and help prevent hospitalizations by reducing overall community transmission.
- During the fourth wave of the pandemic in Alberta, the rate of COVID-19 cases has been highest among those aged 5 to 11 years compared to other age groups. Vaccine will help protect them from getting sick with COVID-19 and reduce outbreak and personal disruptions that result in kids being home from school and other important activities.

- While serious outcomes from COVID-19 infection in children are rare, throughout the pandemic, to date there have been 78 cases hospitalized and 20 cases admitted to ICU in children age 5 to 11. Preventing infection further reduces the risk of having a serious outcome.
- COVID-19 infection can cause a rare but severe condition in children called MIS-C (multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children). In Alberta, there have been 29 cases of MIS-C linked to COVID-19 infection in children age 5 to 11. Preventing infection can reduce the risk of this outcome.
- There is still a lot we don't know about [post-COVID syndrome](#), in children, but it is possible for children to have symptoms for months after infection, even if they don't have severe outcomes at first. Preventing infection reduces this risk.

There is a very small risk of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) associated with COVID-19 vaccines that has been seen in older children, particularly teenage males. In Alberta, there have been 23 confirmed cases of myocarditis after COVID-19 vaccination in youths aged 12 to 17 years, which works out to 9 cases per 100,000 vaccinated youths in that age group. We know that the risk of myocarditis after any infection is typically higher in the teenage population than in younger children, so it is possible that this risk after vaccine will be lower in younger children. It is also important to remember that the risk of developing myocarditis is significantly higher following COVID-19 infection than following vaccination.

### **How to get your child vaccinated**

If you choose to get your 5 to 11 year old child vaccinated, they will be able to get their first dose of the [Pfizer-BioNTech \(Comirnaty\) COVID-19 vaccine](#) soon. The timing is based on vaccine arrival, so please check online for the most up to date information. Two doses are needed to be fully protected, and second doses are recommended at least eight weeks after the first dose. We also recommend that if your child is getting other vaccines in addition to COVID-19 this fall, that the spacing is at least fourteen days between the different vaccines. While in other age groups we have seen that taking other vaccines with the COVID vaccine has been safe and effective, this spacing for 5 to 11 year olds is recommended for now as a precaution in our monitoring to watch for any side effects.

When vaccine is available, you will be able to book an appointment by using the [online booking tool](#) or by calling 811. Parent or guardian consent is required for children to get their vaccine, either provided in-person or by signing a consent form, at the vaccine appointment.

### **Where to find more information**

For more information about COVID-19, you can visit: [Alberta Health](#), [Alberta Health Services](#), and the [Government of Canada](#). Information in 13 other languages is also [available](#). Please speak to your child's health care provider if you have any questions about the vaccines.

The pandemic continues to create stress for our children and families so if you need support or information about mental health and well-being, please visit the Alberta Health Services website [Help in Tough Times](#), or you can call Health Link for information and help by dialing 811.

Whatever decision you make about vaccines for your children, I want to thank you for all you have done to keep our families and communities healthy and safe.

Sincerely,



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Chief Medical Officer of Health