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# COVID-19 vaccination

## A guide for parents of children and young people aged five to 17

**March 2022**

This leaflet explains the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination programme for children and young people aged five to 17.

The vaccine is strongly recommended for children and young people aged five to 17 who have health conditions that put them at high risk from COVID-19. Other children and young people aged 12 to 17 are advised to get the vaccine. Parents of children aged five to 11 who are not at high risk may also choose to have their children vaccinated. However, there are fewer benefits of vaccination in this group. Getting vaccinated is a safe and effective way to protect against serious illness and hospitalisation with COVID-19.

### What is COVID-19 (coronavirus)?

COVID-19 is a very infectious respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Very few children and young people with COVID-19 go on to have severe disease. There is no cure for COVID-19, although some newly tested treatments do help to reduce the risk of complications.

### Who can have the vaccine and when?

The NHS is offering two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine to children and young people. Those aged five to 17 who are at greater risk from COVID-19 infection will need two doses of the vaccine eight weeks apart. All other children and young people aged five to 17 should be offered their first and second dose of vaccine 12 weeks apart.

### What vaccine will be offered to children and young people?

Currently, the preferred vaccine for children and young people aged five to 17 is the Pfizer vaccine (brand name Comirnaty®). Children aged five to 11 will be offered a 10-microgram dose of this vaccine. Young people aged 12 to 17 will be offered a 30-microgram dose, but those aged 12 may be offered either dose. The vaccine for adolescents and adults is effective and safe for them to have. You can read the Pfizer leaflets here:

<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/13134/pil>

<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/12634/pil#gref>



## **COVID-19 vaccination and those who have a severely weakened immune system**

Children and young people with a severely weakened immune system may not have as good an immune response to the first two doses of COVID-19 vaccine. An extra (third) dose at least eight weeks after their second dose is recommended to give them better protection. You can discuss the timing of the third dose with your specialist.

### **Will a COVID-19 booster vaccine be needed?**

Young people aged 16 to 17, those aged 12 to 15 who are at higher risk from COVID-19, and anyone living with immunosuppressed people of any age should be offered a booster at least three months after completing their main (also called primary) course of vaccines.

### **What is the risk from COVID-19?**

Coronavirus can affect anyone. For most children and young people, COVID-19 is a mild illness and rarely leads to complications. For very few people, the symptoms may last for longer than the usual two to three weeks. Fewer children and young people than adults are admitted to hospital or intensive care or die from COVID-19. However, small numbers of children and young people will get seriously ill and have to go to hospital.

Although the risk from COVID-19 is very small for all children and young people, it is higher in older children than younger children. The risks of COVID-19 infection are also higher for children with underlying health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, serious heart problems, and chest complaints or breathing difficulties, including poorly controlled asthma.

For more information on the **full list** of conditions, go to:

[phw.nhs.wales/topics/immunisation-and-vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-information/eligibility-for-the-vaccine](https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/immunisation-and-vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-information/eligibility-for-the-vaccine)

Getting vaccinated is a safe and effective way to protect against serious illness and being hospitalised with COVID-19. Vaccination is also expected to offer some protection against future waves of COVID-19 infection. The current Omicron variant appears to be particularly mild in children and young people. It is not known if future variants will be as mild.

### **Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for children and young people?**

The medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), has confirmed the Pfizer vaccine is safe and effective for children and young people. This followed a rigorous review of the safety, quality and effectiveness of the vaccines in this age group.



## Protection from the COVID-19 vaccination

The Pfizer vaccine that is being offered produces a strong immune response and will provide some short-term protection against infection. There is good evidence that the vaccine will provide longer-term protection against severe illness.

It may take a few weeks to build up some protection from the vaccine. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but the effects should be less severe.

The vaccines do not contain organisms that grow in the body, and so are safe for children with disorders of the immune system. These people may not respond so well to the vaccine, but it should offer them protection against severe disease.

## What happens next?

- You or your child will be given information about when and where the vaccination will be offered.
- Wearing loose short-sleeved clothing on the day of the appointment makes it easier to get to the top of the arm, where the vaccine will be given.
- Some children and young people have a fear of needles and can feel anxious. Let the person giving the vaccine know if this is the case. They will be understanding and supportive.
- Your child may like to bring a favourite toy with them to play with while they wait. Here is a link to some ideas to reduce your child's anxiety during vaccination: [phw.nhs.wales/distraction-techniques](https://phw.nhs.wales/distraction-techniques)

## What about giving consent?

All parents and carers with parental responsibility will be asked to give informed consent (permission) for their child to have the vaccine.

In some circumstances, young people aged 12 to 15 may be mature enough to give consent themselves if they fully understand what is being offered, although it is best that parents or carers are involved in their decision about having the vaccine. Young people aged 16 and 17 are able to give consent themselves.

It is important young people read the information about the COVID-19 vaccination and understand the risks and benefits of vaccination. The nurse or person giving the vaccination will be able to discuss the vaccine at the appointment and answer any questions.

## Are there any reasons why the vaccine should not be given?

There are very few children and young people who cannot have the COVID-19 vaccine.

The vaccine should not be given to anyone who has had:

- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to any of the ingredients of the vaccine; or



- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of the same COVID-19 vaccine.

Children and young people with a history of serious allergic reaction to food, an identified drug or vaccine or an insect sting can have the COVID-19 vaccine, as long as they are not known to be allergic to any ingredient of the vaccine. It is important that the person giving the vaccine knows if the child or young person has ever had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

### **Can COVID-19 vaccines be given at the same time as other vaccines?**

Yes, COVID-19 vaccines can be given at the same time as most other vaccines. For the latest advice on this, please visit: [phw.nhs.wales/covidvaccine](https://phw.nhs.wales/covidvaccine)

### **Can the vaccine be given following COVID-19 infection?**

If a child or young person has had COVID-19, they should:

- wait at least four weeks before being vaccinated if they are in a group that is at greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19; or
- wait at least 12 weeks before getting their vaccine if they are not in a group that is at greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

### **Common side effects**

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short term and not everyone gets them. The very common side effects should only last a day or two. The Pfizer vaccine tends to cause more side effects after the second dose.

Very common side effects in the first day or two include:

- a heavy feeling or soreness where you had the injection;
- feeling achy or like you've got flu;
- feeling tired; and
- having a headache.

Children and young people can take paracetamol (in the correct dose and form for their age) to help make them feel better. It's important to read the dosing instructions on (or in) the packet. Although feeling feverish for two to three days after the COVID-19 vaccination is not uncommon, a high temperature is unusual and may show they have COVID-19 or another infection.

**Remember – children and young people under 16 should not take medicines that contain aspirin.**

Symptoms following vaccination normally last less than a week.

If your child's symptoms seem to get worse or if you are concerned, you can visit [111.wales.nhs.uk](https://111.wales.nhs.uk) online, call NHS 111 Wales by dialling **111**, or contact your GP surgery. If 111 is not available in your area, call **0845 46 47**. Calls to 111 are free



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from landlines and mobiles. Calls to 0845 46 47 cost 2p per minute plus your telephone provider's usual charge.

### **Less common side effects**

Cases of inflammation of the heart (called myocarditis or pericarditis) have been reported very rarely after COVID-19 vaccines.

Most children and young people recover from this and feel better following rest and simple treatment.

In the USA, where the vaccine has been used for longer, all side effects have been reported much less commonly after the children's dose of vaccine.

### **Get medical advice urgently if you have any of these side effects.**

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Feelings that your heart is fluttering or pounding or beating very fast

If you do get advice from a doctor or nurse, make sure you tell them about your child's vaccination (show them the vaccine record card, if possible) so that they can make a proper assessment.

### **Make sure you keep the vaccine record card safe**

You can report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines online through the Yellow Card scheme. The Coronavirus Yellow Card system is a website where you can report any side effects from the vaccine. Visit:

[coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk](https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk)

### **Can you catch COVID-19 from the vaccine?**

You cannot catch COVID-19 from the vaccine but it is possible to have caught COVID-19 and not have the symptoms until after your vaccination. The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a new continuous cough;
- a high temperature; or
- loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell.

If your child has any of the symptoms above, stay at home and arrange for them to have a test by phoning 119 (calls are free) or go to:

[gov.wales/get-tested-coronavirus-covid-19](https://gov.wales/get-tested-coronavirus-covid-19)

If you need more information on symptoms, visit [111.wales.nhs.uk](https://111.wales.nhs.uk)



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### **What to do next**

Your child's vaccine record card will show details of the first dose. The second dose will be offered after eight or 12 weeks. Keep the card safe and take it to the next appointment.

### **If your child is not well when their appointment is due**

They should not attend a vaccine appointment if they are not well or if they are self-isolating or waiting for a COVID-19 test or result. Wait until they have recovered to have the vaccine.

### **How is COVID-19 spread?**

COVID-19 is spread through droplets breathed out from the nose or mouth, particularly when speaking or coughing. It can also be picked up by touching your eyes, nose and mouth after contact with contaminated objects and surfaces.

You **must** still follow the current guidance at [gov.wales/coronavirus](https://gov.wales/coronavirus)

### **More information**

You can find out more information about COVID-19 vaccines, including their contents and possible side effects, at:

[coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/productinformation](https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/productinformation)

You can report suspected side effects online at: [coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk](https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk) or by downloading the Yellow Card app.

To find out how the NHS uses your information, visit:

[111.wales.nhs.uk/AboutUs/Yourinformation](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/AboutUs/Yourinformation)

For other formats of this leaflet, visit: [phw.nhs.wales/covid-19-vaccination](https://phw.nhs.wales/covid-19-vaccination)

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