

# COVID Vaccines for Kids & Teens

**Q&A with Dr. Bukhosi Dube, Oregon Health Authority senior health advisor and co-host of the radio show “Ask a Black Doctor”**



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## If my children are healthy and never get sick, should they get the vaccine?

**Dr. Bukhosi Dube:** Yes, they should get vaccinated, just like they should get their routine vaccinations for measles, flu and other preventable diseases. The CDC recommends vaccination for everyone age 12 and older to help protect against COVID-19. We know they protect kids from getting COVID-19 and will also help keep them from getting very sick or having to go to the hospital. Vaccines help our immune systems to be better and faster by teaching them how to recognize and get rid of germs without making us sick.

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## Does the vaccine work as well for kids as for adults?

Yes, it does. Like all vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine teaches our bodies to fight the virus and protects us from getting very sick from COVID-19, no matter your age. In fact, research has shown that the Pfizer vaccine is extremely effective in preventing the COVID-19 virus in children ages 12 – 15. Previous research showed that the vaccine is 95% effective in preventing the coronavirus with symptoms in people ages 16 and older. And so far early research suggests that the vaccine is 96% effective at preventing people from getting very sick and going to the hospital because of the Delta variant.

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## My child has allergies, is it safe for them to get the vaccine?

If your child has allergies, it doesn't mean they will have an adverse reaction to the vaccine. However, if your child has had a previous reaction to a component of the COVID-19 vaccine they should not receive it. If you're concerned, your best bet is to talk to your child's healthcare provider.

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### **Are the side effects from the vaccine better or worse for kids than the symptoms of COVID-19?**

The possible side effects from the vaccine are the same in kids and teens as they are in older adults. Some people have some soreness at the injection site, fatigue and/or headache. Less common are muscle aches, chills, joint pain, vomiting, or fever. It is true that side effects can be more common in youth and younger people than among older adults but most discomfort will go away within a day – and the side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine are normal signs that your body is building protection. The symptoms of COVID-19 range from mild to very sick, and having the illness can result in long-term health impacts. The virus can also be fatal.

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### **Why is it important that I get the vaccine for my child now?**

Back to school time is here. COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are going up in Oregon. According to the Oregon Health Authority's latest data, cases are on the rise for children, too. As with COVID-19 cases overall, more and more children have gotten sick from COVID-19 since July. Because children ages 11 and younger can't get vaccinated yet, it's more urgent than ever for everyone who is 12 and older to get vaccinated. This will help slow the spread of COVID-19 to protect our communities, especially with schools opening and colder weather coming.

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### **What is in the vaccine and why should I trust that it's safe to give to my kids?**

The Pfizer vaccine is the only one authorized or approved for people under age 18. It is an mRNA, or messenger RNA, vaccine. Many vaccines put a weakened or inactivated germ into our bodies, but mRNA vaccines do not. Instead, they teach our cells how to make a protein, or a piece of a protein, that triggers a response from our immune system. The COVID-19 vaccine provides safe and effective protection for kids against the virus. The vaccines have been used under the safest monitoring in U.S. history. In the clinical trials for children 12 to 15 years old, there were no safety concerns with the Pfizer vaccine and children's immune systems responded to the vaccine in a way like that of older teens and young adults. To get the most protection, your child will need two shots given three weeks (21 days) apart.

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### **What should I ask my children's healthcare provider or pediatrician before I get them vaccinated?**

Your healthcare provider is always a great resource. You should talk to your child's doctor about any allergies or allergic reactions to vaccines that your child has had in the past. You may also want to ask for advice on using a non-aspirin pain reliever and other steps you can take at home to comfort your child if they have any side effects.

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