

FAQ COVID vaccine for children with disability

In January 2022 ACD hosted a Facebook Live Q&A about COVID vaccines for children with disability aged five to 11. This is a summary of answers from paediatrician Dr Sarah Loveday to questions raised by families.

Q: What do we know about the safety of the vaccine from children around the world having it?

A: The vaccine underwent three phases of testing to be approved. It was:

1. Tested on a small group of 2000 children where the vaccine works effectively
2. Tested on a group of 5000 children to ensure rarer side effects weren't missed
3. Given to 8 million children around the world from countries such as Canada, US and Denmark

We know it's a safe vaccine and it doesn't have any rare side effects because of this wide testing and use.

Q: How does the children's dose differ from the adult dose?

A: There are still two shots, but both shots are at one third of the adult dose. So, 10 micrograms for children as opposed to 30 micrograms for adults.

Q: What are some of the side effects of the vaccine?

A: Some side effects may include a sore arm, headache and feeling tired. Very few report getting a fever or muscle aches.

Q: If we have concerns as parents about these side effects what should we do?

A: You should always go to your family GP – and less than 1% of families will need to do this because of the vaccine. It's also important to note children experience even fewer side effects than adults.

Q: Is the vaccine effective against the Omicron variant?

A: In the original trials, it was 91% effective for children against symptomatic disease. Even just one vaccine is effective in reducing the rate of infection in children and hospitalization.

Q: If my child has had COVID should they be vaccinated?

A: Yes – children have a lower immune response so even if they've had COVID they're more likely than adults to get it again. Even though COVID is a mild illness in most children, vaccination is important as it can prevent longer term complications, serious infection and hospitalization that can still occur in some children.

Q: Does there need to be a gap between when my child had COVID and when they get vaccinated?

A: You can have the vaccine as soon as you are feeling well again, so you don't have to wait for three months anymore.

Q: If my child has just had a medical procedure with general anaesthetic, when can they have the vaccine?

A: If your child has just had a medical procedure, you don't need to wait. If they currently have a gastro-type illness, wait until they're better. If your child is on antibiotics, it's okay to get the vaccine and they don't have to wait until they've finished their course.

If your child has had a seizure that is outside of their normal seizures, or it's prolonged or just a bit different, wait a couple of days afterwards. If your child is having a normal pattern of seizures, then the vaccine is completely safe.

Q: If you have a child that's nearly 12, or a tall 11 year old, should they wait until they're 12 to get the adult vaccine?

A: Your immune response is a function of age and not size. The best vaccine is the one you can get right now. So, don't wait, go and get it. If your child is 11 and will turn 12 in the period between doses, they can receive the children's vaccine for dose one, and the adult's vaccine for dose two.

Q: If you have a small five year old, should they also wait?

A: Again, best to get the vaccine now rather than waiting.

Q: Should a child with a heart issue get the vaccine?

A: Myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) is really rare. It's at most a problem in older teenage boys, and not a problem in children. It's safe even if you've had heart surgery or heart arrhythmia in the past. If your child currently has myocarditis, they need to wait six months until that resolves before getting the vaccine.

Q: How does the vaccine affect children with asthma?

A: There are no increased side effects for children with asthma.

Q: What about a child with a recent tachycardia event?

A: It depends on the underlying reason for why that child had a tachycardia event. If it was because of heart muscle inflammation, wait three months until your cardiologist is happy. If it was mild arrhythmia, then it's still safe to get the vaccine.

Q: What about a child who has anaphylaxis to food such as dairy or peanuts?

A: The vaccine is safe – no milk, egg or peanut products are in it. Some parents might still be nervous, so speak with your GP where you may feel more comfortable.

ACD provides general information about COVID vaccines for families of children with disability in Victoria. Speak to your GP for medical advice for your child and family.