

Vaccines for all pave way to loosen masks, social distancing restrictions

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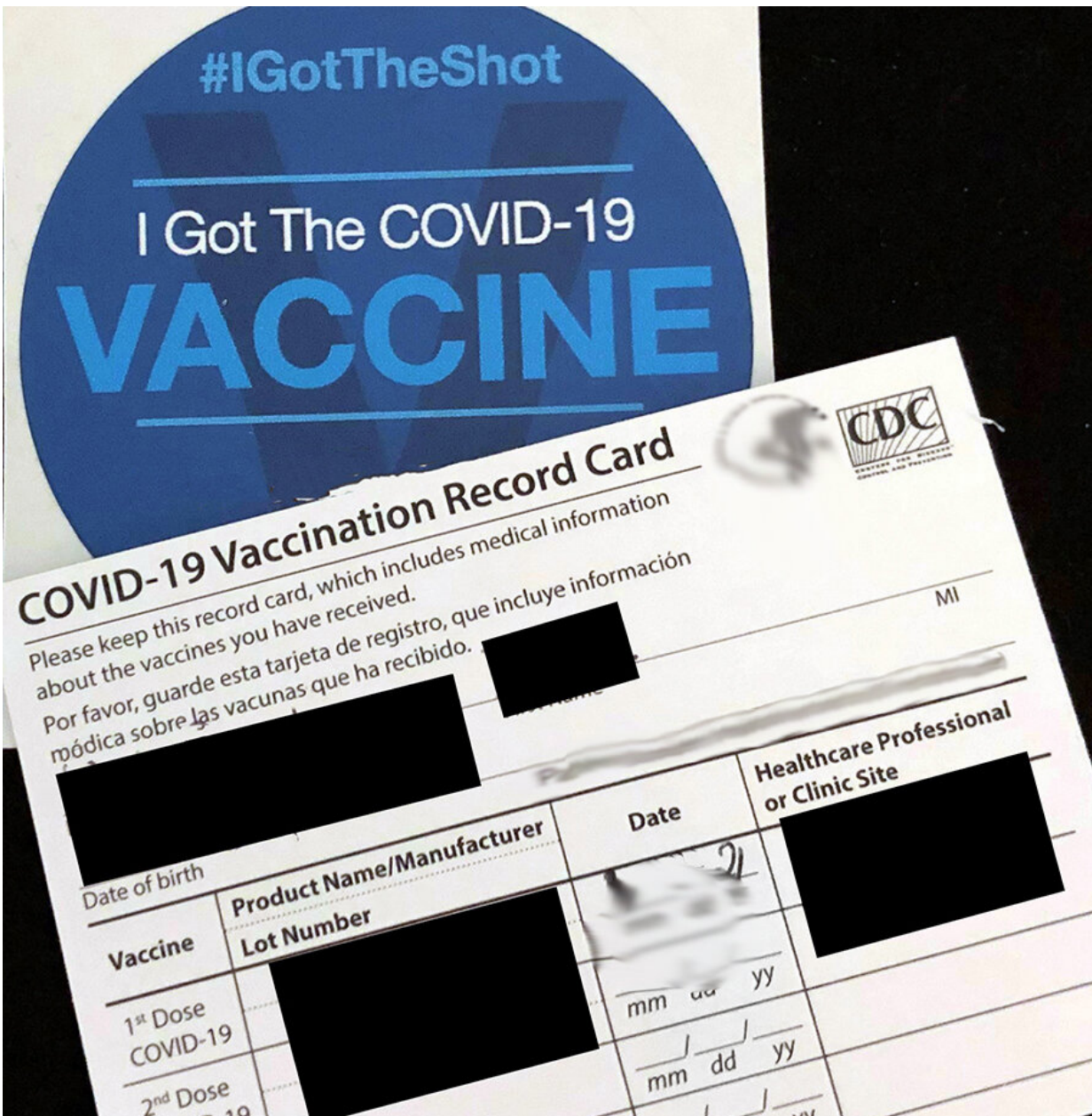
Credit: American Heart Association

Major announcements this week from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are moving the U.S. closer to controlling the COVID-19 pandemic in this country. The FDA issued a [decision](#) to authorize emergency use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine in 12 through 15-year-old adolescents, a move the CDC quickly [endorsed](#). Additionally, CDC officials [announced](#) that people who are fully vaccinated can resume most normal activities without wearing a mask or social distancing, except in cases governed by certain laws and regulations.

The American Heart Association, the world's leading voluntary organization dedicated to a world of longer, healthier lives, supports these new recommendations and continues to urge everyone who is eligible, now including adolescents, to get the COVID-19 vaccine available to them.

"We support this new guidance from the CDC loosening restrictions on wearing masks and social distancing because of the growing evidence that vaccines are nearly 100% effective against deaths and hospitalization from COVID," said American Heart Association President Mitchell Elkind, M.D., M.S., FAHA, FAAN, a professor of neurology and epidemiology at Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons and attending neurologist at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center. "These recommendations are safe for the majority of our [heart](#) disease and stroke survivors because they have the same benefits from vaccines as people who don't have [cardiovascular disease](#)."

Additionally, Elkind noted that vaccination is especially important for people of all ages with cardiovascular disease or other chronic conditions like [high blood pressure](#), obesity or diabetes, because these individuals are most at risk for serious complications from COVID-19.



Credit: American Heart Association

"The risk of COVID-19 causing death and disability is vastly higher than the risk of vaccine adverse effects," he said. "We are also concerned about the long-term effects of COVID-19. Even if you don't get severely ill right now, or even have serious symptoms, you still could have long-term damage that causes [health problems](#) down the road."

Most children with COVID-19 are asymptomatic or exhibit only mild symptoms. But some children have developed a more serious inflammatory syndrome, often leading to hospitalization and occasionally requiring intensive care. And as more adults are getting vaccinated, children are among the fastest growing group to contract the virus.

"We are pleased that vaccination is now approved for our younger population. Even our most [vulnerable children](#) and teens with [congenital heart disease](#) can be safely vaccinated," said Shelley Miyamoto, M.D., chair of the American Heart Association's Council on Lifelong Congenital Heart Disease and Heart Health in the Young (Young Hearts) and director of the cardiomyopathy program at Children's Hospital Colorado in Colorado Springs. "We are hearing of more cases of young people suffering long-term health effects associated with COVID-19, which could drastically impact a bright future ahead of them. But it's even more likely they could spread the virus to other people who are at greater risk such as a parent, grandparent, a teacher at school or anyone in the community."

Miyamoto noted that, as with the vaccine for adults, the vaccine for younger children has been through rigorous testing and thorough review by the FDA and CDC. Over 2,000 adolescents between 12-15 were in the clinical trials, and among those who received it, the [vaccine](#) was 100% effective at preventing COVID. The side effects for children

between 12-15 are largely the same as those for adults. Except in rare cases, they may have a sore arm or feel more tired or get a headache or chills.

"The Association is confident the benefits of vaccination for all far exceed the very small, rare risks. The benefits also far outweigh the risks of COVID-19 and its potentially fatal consequences," Elkind said.

"Among those benefits is getting to be with people we love and to take part in the activities we've been missing. It's been a long year, and all of that is closer to becoming reality."

Provided by American Heart Association

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