

Study: Public is torn over the issue of COVID-19 vaccinations in children

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New research by a Swansea University expert has highlighted just how torn members of the public are over whether children should be offered COVID-19 vaccines.

The study by Dr. Simon Williams revealed there remains a lot of hesitancy—particularly among [parents](#)—around an issue which many regard as a minefield.

It has just been published on MedRxiv, a site used by researchers to share new findings on timely issues before they have been peer-reviewed for publication in a journal.

Its main findings were:

- Overall, COVID-19 vaccination in [children](#) was seen as a complex issue with no easy answer. Many parents and members of the public were hesitant over whether or not children should be offered a vaccine;
- One main reason for this was that many people had a lower risk tolerance for what they saw as unknown longer-term risks of the vaccines in children. Although many were willing to tolerate those risks for themselves, they felt children were likely to be more vulnerable, and wanted to wait for more evidence;
- Other reasons for hesitancy were people's uncertainty over whether children can catch, transmit or be severely harmed by COVID-19 and social norms among other parents not wanting to get their children vaccinated yet;
- One of the key reasons why people supported vaccinations in children was to continue to protect others in society; and,
- Those who were more hesitant about, or opposed to vaccination in children, tended to associate the vaccination program more closely with government and politics. Those who were more open to or supportive about the idea tended to associate the vaccination program more closely with science and the health service. The latter argued that, provided scientists and medical regulators could demonstrate it was safe, they would be more likely to support the idea of vaccination in children.

The study is the latest report from the [Swansea University Public Views of the COVID-19 Pandemic project](#). The research involved online focus groups and interviews with people from across the UK throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to explore their views and experiences on a range of topics related to the pandemic, including vaccinations in children.

Dr. Williams, senior lecturer in people & organizations, said: "The speed and extent of vaccine uptake in the UK has been remarkable. However, there is an ongoing debate in the UK about whether we should make vaccination available to older children, particularly since a number of countries are already doing so.

"This study looked at public attitudes to this and found that, although feelings were mixed, there was a lot of hesitancy. This could be because people, particularly parents, tend to be much more risk averse when it comes to children as compared to themselves.

"As such, many seem to be thinking the risks of the vaccine outweigh the benefits—because they see a lack of evidence on the safety of the vaccine in children, particularly in the long term, coupled with the fact that children are not harmed by the disease in the same way as adults.

"However, it could be the case that if, and when, the [vaccine](#) is approved for use for older children in the UK, as more evidence comes out and more people start having their children vaccinated, this hesitancy will start to decline, in the same way as it did with adult vaccinations over the past year.

"Either way, political and health organizations will need to recognize and engage with parents, many of whom may feel that the decision of whether to have their children vaccinated is far from an easy one."

More information: Simon N Williams, Public attitudes towards

COVID-19 vaccination in children: A qualitative study, (2021). [DOI: 10.1101/2021.07.28.21261252](https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.07.28.21261252)

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