

With the COVID-19 vaccine for children near, will parents give it to their kids?

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The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine has been tested on children ages 5 to 11 and deemed "safe and highly effective," the company announced recently, amid its ongoing clinical trials for children.

The positive results represent "a timely step forward" in the fight to contain the spread of COVID-19 heading into yet another winter season,

says Neil Maniar, professor of public health practice, associate chair of the department of health sciences, and director of the master of public health program at Northeastern.

"This is another really important step forward as we all try to emerge from this pandemic, and try to get to a much better, and a much safer, new normal," Maniar says.

But questions loom: Will parents who are not vaccinated themselves give their [children](#) the shot? How quickly can authorities disburse the tailored doses to families, and will there be mandates?

Pfizer says its vaccine made for kids ages 5 to 11 produced "robust" antibody responses in the youngsters that were comparable to those produced by the vaccine given to adults ages 16 to 25 in a separate trial. The children received a much smaller dosage than the adults did, according to Pfizer.

Millions of children have tested positive for COVID-19 in the U.S., and at least 460 have died, according to data from last week. Although children typically fare better than adults who get the infection, they are susceptible to other serious conditions linked to COVID-19, such as multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children.

That, combined with the risks associated with unvaccinated children gathering in school settings—and the infectiousness of the delta variant—"underscores the importance" of vaccinating the school-age population, Maniar says. With roughly 76% of U.S. adults having received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, according to the latest CDC [data](#), rolling out COVID vaccine for kids will be "filling an important gap" in the broader vaccination effort, he says.

"The population under [age] 11 has really been one of the key at-risk

populations due to there not being a vaccine available to them," Maniar says.

Pending approval from the federal Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Pfizer shots could become available to children in the 5-11 age group sometime in October.

Continued education about the benefits of the vaccine will be critical in successfully rolling out a vaccine program that targets children, Maniar says, adding that many parents will be seeking input to decide whether or not to get their children inoculated.

And inoculations for school-age children couldn't come at a better time, Maniar says. Hospitalizations among children have risen dramatically in recent weeks, and were up fivefold from June to mid-August as the delta variant began spreading across the U.S.

Approval of the COVID vaccine for kids also would come as hospital ICUs across the country continue to fill up with largely unvaccinated COVID-19 patients—a problem made worse by increasing burnout among health care workers. But new cases have started to taper off nationally, down about 18% over the last 14 days, according to New York Times data.

On top of the promising clinical trial results, the real-world efficacy of the vaccines in combating the delta variant only adds to the urgency of approving shots for kids, Maniar says. The death rates from COVID-19 in the 10 states with the lowest vaccination rates were on average four times higher than the [death rates](#) of the 10 states with the highest vaccination rates, according to CNN.

There's a lot resting on the success of the effort to vaccinate children, says Jenny Gormley, lead nurse planner and director of Northeastern's

school health academy. Which is also why we should be more tolerant of questions from parents and families who might be curious about getting their children vaccinated.

"It's good that parents have questions," Gormley says. "It's really great that people want to learn more about the vaccine, about its safety, how it was developed—and we want to support their concerns."

With infection rates at their highest points in the undervaccinated regions, concerns over [vaccine](#) hesitancy persist. But Gormley believes that those dire circumstances will ultimately push many hesitant parents to give their children the shots.

"I think the adults who have got vaccinated after some hesitation, or have witnessed people who have gotten sick or died—they'll be early adopters," she says.

Provided by Northeastern University

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