Spain urges child vaccinations and boosters before Christmas

December 15 2021

A young girl receives a vaccine as children are administered the first shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at Hospital de Henares in Coslada, Madrid, Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2022. Starting from Wednesday, Spain is trying to begin a speedy vaccination rollout for around 3.3 million children aged 5-11, the group that is leading contagion rates in the country and largely believed to be spreading new infections to their parents and grandparents. Credit: AP Photo/Bernat Armangue

Spanish health authorities are stepping up efforts to give out coronavirus vaccine shots before Christmas and end-of-the-year gatherings that usually bring large groups together.

On Wednesday, the same day that the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines for 3.3 million children aged between 5 and 11 began across Spain and in other parts of the European Union, regional health authorities in Spain approved widening the scope of those eligible for a booster shot.

After offering third doses to health workers, high-risk groups and those 60 and older during the past two months, Spain will start giving extra shots to people 50 and over, Health Minister Carolina Darias announced at a press conference late Wednesday.

Earlier, during a visit to a school in central Spain where children and their families lined up for their first shots, Darias said vaccination should speed up ahead of the increase in "mobility and social interaction" around Christmas.

"Today is a day charged with emotion," the minister told reporters. "I'm satisfied and encouraged to see so many parents with their children here."

Spaniards have displayed a strong vaccination acceptance, leading to nearly 90% of residents aged 12 or older being fully vaccinated.

A young girl watches as a boy receives a vaccine as children are administered the first shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at Hospital de Henares in Coslada, Madrid, Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2022. Starting from Wednesday, Spain is trying to begin a speedy vaccination rollout for around 3.3 million children aged 5-11, the group that is leading contagion rates in the country and largely believed to be spreading new infections to their parents and grandparents. Credit: AP Photo/Bernat Armangue

A nurse prepares to administer a shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children at the Hospital de Henares in Coslada, Madrid, Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2022. Starting from Wednesday, Spain is trying to begin a speedy vaccination rollout for around 3.3 million children aged 5-11, the group that is leading contagion rates in the country and largely believed to be spreading new infections to their parents and grandparents. Credit: AP Photo/Bernat Armangue

But children under 11, who represent about 7% of the population, are now believed to be one of the groups spreading most infections. The contagion rate among them—667 new cases per 100,000 children in two weeks— is nearly 50% higher than the national average of 441 new cases. Their parents, many of them aged between 40 to 49, show the second-highest rate of infection, 550 new cases per 100,000 people in 14 days.

On Wednesday, Spain reported 27,140 new daily infections, the highest number since the end of July, and 77 more COVID-19 deaths, although hospital admissions are growing at a slower pace than in previous virus surges.

Spain has officially recorded 88,619 virus deaths since the beginning of the pandemic.

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