

Brazil starts vaccinating children after weeks of delay

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A health worker gives a shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to 8-year-old Indigenous youth Davi Seremramiwe Xavante at the Hospital da Clinicas in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Friday, Jan. 14, 2022. The state of Sao Paulo started the COVID-19 vaccination of children between ages 5 and 11. Credit: AP Photo/Andre Penner

Fifteen Brazilian children received COVID-19 vaccines on Friday,

marking the start of an effort that was delayed several weeks by the federal government's reluctance to endorse the immunization of children.

The country's health regulator issued approval on Dec. 16 for the administration of the Pfizer shot to kids aged 5 to 11. The decision incensed Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, who has since complained about vaccinating children, saying he won't let his 11-year-old daughter get shots and warning of possible side effects.

A study released by U.S. health authorities in late December determined that serious side effects of the Pfizer vaccine in 5 to 11 year olds are rare. The results were based on approximately 8 million doses dispensed to youngsters in that age group.

Rather than follow the regulators' guidance, Bolsonaro's Health Ministry [published an online questionnaire asking if children should need a doctor's prescription to get the shot.](#) Some of the president's supporters, like him leery of vaccines, campaigned on social media apps for people to vote against them for children.

Despite that, a majority of the survey's almost 100,000 participants opposed the need for prescriptions and the Health Ministry [announced last week that it would allow children to be vaccinated.](#)



A health worker holds a vial of the Pfizer vaccine for COVID-19 during a vaccination campaign for children at the Hospital da Clinicas in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Friday, Jan. 14, 2022. The state of Sao Paulo started the COVID-19 vaccination of children between ages 5 and 11. Credit: AP Photo/Andre Penner

An 8-year-old from the Xavante Indigenous group was the first to get a shot at the ceremony in Sao Paulo's Hospital das Clinicas, one day after 1.2 million doses designated for children arrived at an airport in the state.

The boy has been undergoing treatment in Sao Paulo for a genetic disease that requires him to wear braces on his legs. His father Jurandir Siridiwe, a tribal leader, watched his son's immunization broadcast via the internet.

"If we had started immediately after Anvisa (the [health](#) regulator) approved in December the Pfizer vaccine for kids of this age, today all the children in Brazil would have been vaccinated with at least one dose," Gov. João Doria said at the event.

The Health Ministry recommended an eight-week interval between children's first and second doses of the Pfizer shot, rather than the three weeks recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



A health worker gives a shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to 9-year-old Indigenous youth Stella Para Poty Fernandes Martins at the Hospital da Clinicas in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Friday, Jan. 14, 2022. The state of Sao Paulo started the COVID-19 vaccination of children between ages 5 and 11. Credit: AP Photo/Andre Penner



Eight-year-old Indigenous youth Davi Seremramiwe Xavante shows his COVID-19 vaccination card, alongside the Governor of Sao Paulo Joao Doria, after getting a shot of the Pfizer vaccine during a vaccination campaign for children at the Hospital da Clinicas in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Friday, Jan. 14, 2022. The state of Sao Paulo started the COVID-19 vaccination of children between ages 5 and 11. Credit: AP Photo/Andre Penner



Nine-year-old Indigenous youth Stella Para Poty Fernandes Martins shows her COVID-19 vaccination card to the press after getting a shot of the Pfizer vaccine during a vaccination campaign for children at the Hospital da Clinicas in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Friday, Jan. 14, 2022. The state of Sao Paulo started the COVID-19 vaccination of children between ages 5 and 11. Credit: AP Photo/Andre Penner

In Sao Paulo state, that means children who are scheduled to return to in-person classes at public schools on Feb. 2 will do so before receiving a second dose.

While children are much less likely than adults to suffer [severe illness](#) or die from COVID-19, advocates say vaccinating them can minimize the virus' spread in their families and society as a whole.

Brazil has begun experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases and Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga said Thursday that the highly transmissible omicron variant has become the dominant strain in Brazil.

By Friday afternoon, only six of Brazil's 27 states had received vaccines for children. The Health Ministry's press office cited logistical hiccups and told The Associated Press that the doses will be delivered to the remaining states over the weekend. Most of them will begin vaccinating kids on Monday.

Brazil has about 20 million children aged 5 to 11, according to the ministry.

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