

# Expert stresses importance of vaccinating school-age children for COVID-19

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Parents hoping to get their young children vaccinated for COVID-19 will have to wait at least another two months. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently postponed a decision on an emergency

use authorization of the Pfizer vaccine for kids 6 months to 4 years old. The FDA is waiting on additional data, which are expected in early April.

In October 2021, the FDA approved COVID-19 vaccinations for children 5 to 11, but Mayo Clinic experts say the number of those children getting vaccinated is still low.

"We still have low uptake among the children ages 5 to 11 who are school-age children and around lots of other people who may not be vaccinated. The uptake nationally in them is like low 20% for that age group," says Dr. Melanie Swift, a Mayo Clinic internist and preventive medicine specialist.

Children are as likely as adults to be infected with COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Kids can get sick from COVID-19 and develop serious long-term health complications, including multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. The CDC says children 5-11 who are vaccinated for COVID-19 are also less likely to spread the disease to others, including at home or school.

"These vaccines are incredibly safe. They're very effective at preventing infection in those kids. And the kids do, unfortunately, transmit to elders—you know, the grandparents who desperately want to be with those kids again. So I would make a plea for parents to go ahead and get their children vaccinated if they're old enough," says Dr. Swift.

Since COVID-19 vaccines became available to children 5-11, more than 8,300 kids in that age group have been hospitalized with COVID-19 and nearly 100 have died from the disease, according to the CDC.

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