

# White House: Florida doctors can order under-5 COVID shots

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis attends a media event regarding the 2022 Florida Python Challenge, Thursday, June 16, 2022, in Miami. Florida is the only state that hasn't preordered COVID-19 vaccines for toddlers in anticipation of their final approval by the federal government. DeSantis said Thursday that his administration won't facilitate their distribution, though he said they'll be available to those who want them. Credit: AP Photo/Lynne Sladky

Florida doctors will be able to order COVID-19 vaccines for children under 5 from the federal government, the White House said Friday, after [Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis said the state would not order and distribute the shots in the state.](#)

The state was the only jurisdiction in the nation to decline to place advance orders for the pediatric shots, which received [authorization from the Food and Drug Administration on Friday.](#) Final authorization from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is expected in the coming days, clearing the way for the last remaining unvaccinated age group to obtain shots. The vaccines will be available to children as young as six months.

The White House has been sharply critical of DeSantis' position but in a statement Friday it welcomed the news that he was permitting individual doctors to order vaccines for their patients.

"We have begun shipping vaccines to children's hospitals and pediatricians in every state in the country except Florida," said White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha. "The governor's failure comes at a price to parents and families of Florida."

The jabs will be available quickly at pharmacies and community health centers, which can preorder them directly from the federal government, Jha said. But children's hospitals, clinics and individual doctors' offices will be at a disadvantage to other states that allowed their doctors to preorder, he said.

Jha took a swipe at DeSantis, who has frequently said he is defending parental rights in healthcare and educational decisions, saying, "This administration trusts parents."

"We know there are parents across America of kids under 5 who've been

waiting a very long time, and for many of them, this delay introduced by the actions of the governor and the Department of Health, I think is unconscionable," he said. "I don't think it helps and I think for parents who've been waiting, who have made the choice, it is incumbent on us to make sure that they are able to exercise on that choice."

DeSantis at the Thursday news conference minimized the delays and defended the state's refusal to order the vaccines.



White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre speaks during a press briefing at the White House, Monday, June 13, 2022, in Washington. Credit: AP Photo/Patrick Semansky

"Doctors can get it. Hospitals can get it. But there's not going to be any state programs that are going to be trying to get COVID jabs to infants and toddlers and newborns," he said. "That's not where we're gonna be utilizing our resources."

Federal officials believe most parents of young children plan to get their kids vaccinated at their pediatrician's office, rather than pharmacies or hospitals, and criticized DeSantis for slowing access to the shots.

"Even though Governor DeSantis reversed course and is now ordering vaccines, we will pull every lever to get pediatricians across Florida vaccines as quickly as possible," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "This is an encouraging first step, and we urge the state to order vaccines for its state and local health departments, so that all Florida parents have the opportunity to get their children vaccinated."

DeSantis' decision not to pre-order shots means the state is falling behind pre-orders that were prepared to ship as soon as the FDA issued its emergency use authorization. Jha said the administration was working to fill Florida's orders as soon as possible, but said it would be days behind other states in the vaccination program.

Florida health department spokesman Jeremy Redfern said the Florida online portal for ordering vaccines from the federal government, Florida SHOTS, has always been available to hospitals, clinics and small doctor's offices.

However, under CDC rules, providers can order vaccines only once an Emergency Use Authorization has been issued, Redfern said. Jha disputed that, saying that outside of Florida, states and public health departments have been able to help doctors and children's hospitals place pre-orders for shots for two weeks.

State health departments, on the other hand, have been able to pre-order vaccines in anticipation of an EUA, and this is what Florida has declined to do. That means the state won't have an already existing stockpile of the vaccines to push out to children's hospitals for use on Day 1 of authorization. However, any provider can order shots and get them with days or a week, according the state health department.

"Florida SHOTS will allow individual providers to order shots the way they always have," Redfern said. "The Florida health department is not going to be the [federal government](#)'s storage unit for their giant pile of vaccines."

While DeSantis said the state had plenty of supply for vaccines, officials cautioned that shots approved for under-5 kids contain specialized instructions and syringes appropriate for that age group, and that vaccines labeled for older kids shouldn't be used for the youngest cohort. Pfizer's pediatric [vaccine](#) for younger kids has a smaller dosage than for older ones.

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