

Should you get your young child vaccinated for COVID-19? What parents need to know

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The Food and Drug Administration on Friday authorized the use of COVID-19 vaccines for children between the ages of six months and five years, paving the way for yet another wave of inoculations that

Northeastern experts say will close an important gap in the broader vaccination effort.

Following the FDA's approval, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is expected to greenlight the two vaccines—one by Moderna and another by Pfizer/BioNTech—for that age group on Saturday. Shots for the youngsters could be available as early as next week, according to multiple reports.

The ability to safely vaccinate younger children is good news, says Neil Maniar, professor of practice in the Department of Health Sciences, because many kids are not immune from severe COVID-19 infection.

In fact, a "significant number" of young children have been hospitalized during the omicron wave, he says. [Data](#) from the CDC showed that there were five times as many children under the age of 4 hospitalized with COVID-19 during the omicron wave compared to the wave defined by the delta strain.

"It's really important to offer children vaccinations to prevent [severe illness](#), to prevent death, and to reduce the likelihood of transmission," Maniar says. "This is another really important step for us as we emerge from the pandemic and start to resume a more normal way of life."

In general, younger children are more vulnerable to more severe infections from other viruses, such as influenza, than [school-age children](#), teens and adolescents, says Robert M. Baginski, assistant clinical professor and director of interdisciplinary affairs in the Bouvé College of Health Sciences at Northeastern.

"The reason for that is that [young children] don't have as robust immune systems, and young infants, it's been shown, don't produce a strong antibody response," Baginski says.

But [research](#) has shown that those [younger children](#) seem to be faring much better when contracting COVID-19 compared to other viral infections. Still, more than 400 children under five have died from COVID-19 infection in the U.S., according to the CDC. Small children can also transmit the virus to older, higher-risk family members living in the same household.

There are unique obstacles facing families with children who get COVID-19. An [emergency physician](#) who's treated many young children hospitalized with COVID-19, Baginski says isolating young kids—particularly toddlers—who contract COVID-19 can be hard on parents and caregivers.

"The problem with children is ... how do you isolate an infant [with COVID-19] from a parent or caregiver?" Baginski says.

As parents look to get their children vaccinated, Baginski and Maniar say it's important that they talk to a doctor about any concerns they may have. Approval from the FDA and the pending greenlight from the CDC means that the shots are safe and effective—and that the benefits outweigh the risks.

It's also important, Baginski stresses, that parents don't delay their children's other routine vaccinations. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as other vaccines does not increase the risk of side effects.

What else should parents know?

"Parents should keep an open-mind," Baginski says. "Don't approach this with preconceived notions about vaccines. Ask questions and get the information. More importantly, ask questions and get information from reliable sources. Don't go on Facebook, Instagram or Tiktok."

If your child contracts COVID-19, Baginski says parents should carefully monitor their symptoms. Children's Tylenol and Ibuprofen are safe and can help provide relief. Young children compensate well when they become ill, but can get worse very suddenly.

"Children look like they're faring well until they are not," he says. "That's why it's important that parents have a low threshold to seek medical care."

Maniar says he hopes parents embrace the new vaccines for their children.

"For this age group, it is really important to have that contact with others, that sense of play," Maniar says. "It's a crucial developmental time, and from a developmental perspective, a socio-emotional perspective, mask-wearing has been unhealthy" for this younger age group.

Provided by Northeastern University

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