



Vaccinating children and adolescents against COVID is the right thing to do

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There are many things to regret as we move into the middle of our third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the vaccines are not one of them. They are miracles. They have proven to be remarkably effective at providing long-lasting protection against severe COVID disease, hospitalization, and death. If you are vaccinated, you have a much, MUCH greater chance of surviving COVID, of not getting severely sick, and of avoiding hospitalization.

That's why making sure the vaccines are available to children is so critical. The Pfizer vaccine is already fully approved for those 16 and older, and is authorized for children 5 through 15 years of age. And later this month, external expert advisors for both the FDA and the CDC will consider authorizing and recommending it for children 6 months through 4 years of age. Cumulatively, these experts have more than 1,000 years of experience and training in pediatric and adult infectious diseases, epidemiology and public health. They know what they are doing. I know this because I have been one of two liaisons from the American Academy of Pediatrics to the CDC's advisory committee since 2007. For the past 15 years, including throughout the pandemic, I have witnessed firsthand their dedication to the health and wellbeing of every American as they carefully and methodically evaluate all the data.

The continuing spread of misinformation and disinformation about the COVID vaccines is regretful and dangerous. In many ways, this has been no different from previous pandemics. Even Founding Father Benjamin Franklin, whose four-year-old son died of smallpox in 1736, which at the time was the world's only vaccine-preventable disease. Franklin was forced to confront misinformation when rumors spread that his child died after getting vaccinated for smallpox. Fearing that the gossip would deter other parents from vaccinating their children, Franklin set the record straight by publishing an article in the Pennsylvania Gazette. "I do hereby sincerely declare that he was not [vaccinated]," Franklin wrote. For more than 50 years until his death in 1790, Franklin lamented not having vaccinated his beloved son.

A novel challenge with misinformation during the current pandemic, though, is the ease and speed with which it spreads.

So here are the facts:

- There have been over 4.8 million reported cases of and more than 15,000 hospitalizations for COVID to date among children 5-11 years old.
- COVID-19 was the 11th leading cause of death in children ages 5-11 in 2020.
- Approximately 1 in 12 children have Long COVID following recovery from infection. The most common symptoms are like those found in adults and include fatigue, headache, insomnia, trouble concentrating, muscle and joint pain, and cough.
- Approximately 1 in 3 children who develop Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Childhood, or MIS-C, following an oftentimes asymptomatic COVID infection will still have life-altering impairments six months after their initial illness.

The good news is that the COVID vaccine can prevent much of this suffering:

- Those 5 and older who were vaccinated with at least the primary series were 10-times less likely to die from COVID-19 in February compared with unvaccinated people.
- Those 12 and older who were vaccinated with a primary series and booster dose were 20-times less likely to die from COVID-19 in February compared with unvaccinated people.
- During the Omicron wave last winter, COVID-19 incidence rates among children ages 5-11 who had received the primary vaccine series were 1.3-times lower than rates in unvaccinated children.
- During the Omicron wave, COVID-19-associated hospitalization rates among children ages 5-11 vaccinated with a primary series were half as high as rates in unvaccinated children.

The Pfizer COVID vaccine has been studied in thousands of children. It generates a comparable if not superior immune response in children compared with young adults. We now know that vaccination against COVID requires a 2-dose primary series plus 1 booster dose. This is very consistent with other pediatric vaccines that we have used for decades, where a booster dose cements the benefits of the first doses of the vaccine.

The bottom line:

- COVID can be bad for everyone, including children.
- Severe COVID, hospitalization, and death can be prevented by vaccination.
- COVID vaccines are safe for children, and therefore the same benefit they provide in keeping adults out of the hospital is seen for children.

As physicians, we advise parents to please talk to their child's pediatrician or primary care physician if they have any questions about why their child should receive the COVID vaccine.

Editor's note: This article was written as an op-ed in response to a recent anti-COVID vaccination push and resultant media story. The Chapter leadership thought it would be informative to reprint it here.