



## The COVID-19 Vaccine and Your Child

On November 19, 2021, Health Canada approved the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for the protection of children against COVID-19. We know you want what's best for your child. At Southwestern Public Health we also want to see children, active and healthy, learning in school and enjoying the activities, people, and places they love. That's why we strongly recommend getting your child immunized against the COVID-19 virus.

### **I've thought since the beginning of the pandemic that children don't get very sick from COVID-19. Why should I vaccinate my child against a mild illness?**

Cases in children are usually less severe. However, children do get COVID-19 and do end up in hospital. More than 400 hundred Ontario children have been hospitalized with COVID-19 since the pandemic started.

What we don't know are the long-term complications of having COVID-19 – what is sometimes called “long COVID” or “long haul COVID.” Early research shows that some children are left with fatigue, headaches, insomnia, trouble concentrating, and cough, even after the virus is gone.

Finally, even when they are not very sick, children can pass the virus to people who are more vulnerable – such as grandparents and other elderly relatives. By vaccinating children, we reduce transmission of the virus.

## Is immunity from “natural” infection better than immunity from vaccines?

Both “natural” infection and vaccines produce an immune response in your body. However, when you are vaccinated, you don’t receive a “live” virus and you don’t develop COVID-19. Vaccines provide your body with instructions for its immune response in a safe, calculated dose. It’s a controlled way to develop your immune response. “Natural” infection leaves us at risk of significant illness, hospitalization, or death.

## How can I be confident that the vaccine is safe for my child?

Before a vaccine is available to us, it is reviewed by Health Canada to make sure it meets very strict safety and efficacy (how well it works) standards. Scientists must collect data to demonstrate their product is safe, effective and of the highest quality. If any of Health Canada’s standards are not met, the vaccine is not approved for use, or sold in Canada.

Once a vaccine is approved for use, legally health care professionals MUST report adverse side effects to their local health unit. This data is shared with Public Health Ontario and Health Canada so that ongoing monitoring can occur. That means we have safety data from the vaccine trials, as well as safety data from use in the real world.

## Are the benefits higher than the risks?

Many daily activities, like driving a car, come with risks. We just don’t think about them much because we know the benefits outweigh the risks. There are risks with getting the vaccine, such as pain, redness, swelling or more serious risks such as an anaphylactic (allergic) reaction. However, these risks are either mild, short-lived, treatable, or extremely rare like anaphylaxis.

Anaphylaxis is rare, but we prepare for it by having the equipment and trained professionals available at vaccination clinics in case someone has an allergic reaction. Choosing not to vaccinate also comes with its own risks, including the risk of serious complications, hospitalization, suffering or death.

## Tell me more about myocarditis and pericarditis as side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine. Those reports make me scared to have my child vaccinated!

Myocarditis is inflammation of the heart muscle. Pericarditis is inflammation of the outer lining of the heart.

In Ontario, Canada, and worldwide, there have been reported cases of myocarditis and pericarditis after vaccination with an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna). Cases are more common in males under the age of 30, after their second dose. It is also slightly more common following Moderna than Pfizer. Most cases reported are mild and the individuals have a quick recovery.

Canada’s National Advisory Committee on Immunization, the American Centre for Disease Control, and the World Health Organization Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety have all stated that the benefits of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are higher than the risks of hospitalization, multi-system inflammatory syndrome, and death. In Ontario, only Pfizer is now available to people under the age of 18 because of the slightly higher chance of myocarditis/pericarditis following use of Moderna.

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