On Oct. 29, 2021, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an emergency use authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 5-11. This is the first COVID-19 vaccine that has been authorized by the FDA for children in this age group. The FDA had previously authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children and adolescents ages 12-15, and this vaccine is fully approved for ages 16 and older. The CDC recommends everyone ages 5 and older receive COVID-19 vaccination to help protect against COVID-19 disease. Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society both strongly support the universal recommendation for COVID-19 vaccination of children 5-11 years of age. The vaccine is a two-dose series, given three weeks apart. The dose is 1/3rd the dose used for adolescents and adults and was developed specifically for children in the 5-11 year age group.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR K-12 SCHOOLS?

Vaccination is an important safety measure to protect children from getting COVID-19 and transmitting COVID-19 to teachers, parents, grandparents, younger children who are not yet eligible for the vaccine, and others in the community, including those at risk for severe disease or with weakened immune systems.

Understandably, parents may have questions or concerns about the vaccine. Below are some common questions and answers school leaders can reference as they encourage the school community to consider vaccination.

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE FOR CHILDREN AGES 5-11

How safe is the vaccine?
Clinical research has shown that the vaccine is safe. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has been rigorously tested for safety and antibody response in the 5-11 age group, and the data have been reviewed by experts at the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The vaccine dose is lower (1/3rd the dose) than that used for adolescents and adults and has been developed and tested specifically for children in the 5-11 year age group.

Why should my child get vaccinated against COVID-19?
Vaccinating children ages 5 years and older can help protect them from getting COVID-19, spreading the virus to others, and getting sick if they do become infected. Children with certain medical conditions are at increased risk for severe disease and hospitalization. These include, but are not limited to:

- Asthma or chronic lung disease
- Obesity
- Neurodevelopmental disorders
- Diabetes
- Weakened immune systems

Children comprise 22 percent of the U.S. population but have accounted for up to 29 percent of COVID-19 cases this fall. From July to October, pediatric COVID-19 cases rose by about 240 percent in the U.S. It is important to vaccinate children against COVID-19 to prevent disease and possible severe disease in children and their contacts.
If children are less likely to have a severe infection of COVID-19, why should my child be vaccinated?
While COVID-19 tends to be milder in children than adults, it can make children very sick, require hospitalization, and some children have even died. Additionally, some children have suffered from the effects of “long COVID.”

- Children accounted for 25% of COVID-19 cases the week of Nov. 25, 2021, and 17% of all COVID-19 infections throughout the pandemic, with more than 7 million pediatric cases reported to date.
- Thousands of children have been hospitalized and more than 750 children have died as a result of COVID-19. In addition, nearly 6,000 children have experienced multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), a serious condition occurring several weeks after COVID-19 and resulting in hospitalization.
- Scientists do not yet understand the long-term effects of COVID-19 infection and lingering symptoms that are reported by some children, including tiredness or fatigue, headache, trouble sleeping, trouble concentrating, muscle and joint pain, and cough.
- Vaccinating children also limits disruptions in school attendance and allows children to more safely participate in learning and other activities crucial for their mental health and development.
- Data suggest vaccinating adults can significantly decrease case numbers, but to obtain sweeping immunity and get control of the pandemic, children also need to be vaccinated.

What are the possible side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?
The most common side effects occur 1-3 days after vaccination and include pain, redness and swelling at the injection site, and general symptoms such as tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever, and nausea. These side effects are temporary and appear to be less common in children receiving the lower dose as compared to adolescents and adults. Serious side effects are extremely rare.

What about the risk of vaccine-associated myocarditis?
Myocarditis is inflammation of the heart. It has been found to be a rare side effect associated with the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna). Myocarditis following vaccination most often occurs in male adolescents and young adults after receipt of the second dose of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine within a week of vaccination. Most patients with myocarditis after vaccine respond well to care and rest and feel better quickly. Myocarditis occurs more commonly after natural infection with SARS-CoV-2 and is more severe than vaccine-associated myocarditis.

For these reasons the CDC continues to recommend that everyone aged 5 years and older get vaccinated for COVID-19. The known risks of COVID-19 illness and its related, possibly severe complications far outweigh the potential risks of having a rare adverse reaction to the vaccine.

Does the COVID-19 vaccine affect fertility?
After millions of vaccinations, there is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccines affect fertility in men or women. If the vaccines do not affect fertility in men and women during their childbearing years, they would not be expected to affect younger children either.

Where can I get the COVID-19 vaccine for my child?
The vaccine for children is free and available through many pediatrician and other healthcare provider offices, local pharmacies, and community vaccination events, along with other sites. The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine requires two doses spaced out over 21 days.

Find a COVID-19 vaccine near you