

VACCINATION OF 5-11 YEAR-OLDS AGAINST COVID-19

Informational tool for **parents and families** to support the decision-making process regarding the vaccination against COVID-19 among 5- to 11-year-olds in Quebec

(The term "parents" includes biological, adoptive or other legal guardians. The masculine gender is used as the neutral gender to refer to women, men or other gender identities.)



SUMMARY OF AVAILABLE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

COVID-19 and Children 5-11 years old

- **Medical problems associated with COVID-19 for 5-11 year-olds are not severe** - Out of 35,000 cases since the start of the pandemic in Quebec, there have been 52 hospitalizations and no deaths (data as of Oct. 16, 2021). However, 5-11 year-olds were the age group with the most cases per 100,000 people during the 4th wave.
- **Common symptoms** - fever, cough, loss of smell, fatigue
- **Possible complications** - difficulty breathing, confusion, chest pain
- **Pediatric Inflammatory Multi-Systemic Syndrome (PIMS)** - A very rare but serious consequence of COVID-19 that occurs a few weeks after infection: this immune reaction attacks organs (brain, kidneys, liver, skin, heart). In Canada, 6 hospitalized cases per 100,000 children have been reported (between March 2020 and May 2021).
- **Long COVID** - The existence of long COVID in children is unclear: 1-4% of children with COVID-19 are reported to have persistent symptoms consistent with long COVID (fatigue, weakness, sleep disturbances, difficulty breathing and concentrating), but there is no evidence that these symptoms are due to COVID-19.
- **Other impacts on children** - The pandemic and infection control measures affect the school, family, and after-school activities and thus may negatively affect the mental health, psychosocial development, and academic achievement of some children.

Benefits of Vaccinating Children Against COVID-19

Although the medical problems associated with COVID-19 in 5-11 year-olds are not severe, there are some benefits to vaccinating children:

- 90.7% protection for the child against the disease with the Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) vaccine
- Decreased risk for the child to develop a severe form of the disease, PIMS (and possibly long COVID)
- Decreased risk of the child transmitting the disease, which helps protect vulnerable individuals, and helps decrease the circulation of the virus in the community and the risk of the virus mutating into new variants
- Reduced risk of transmission at school, which diminishes potential class closures and other inconveniences for children, families and schools
- Improved mental health and reduced anxiety for some children and parents
- Potential improvement in children's development and schooling through more consistent school attendance and socialization

Should some children be vaccinated more than others?

Children who are immunosuppressed or have chronic health problems have a slightly greater risk of severe COVID-19 infection, which may make their vaccination more beneficial.

Should a child who has previously been infected with COVID-19 be vaccinated?

Having the disease reduces the risk of re-infection, but the duration of this protection is uncertain. It is recommended that children who have already had the disease be given a dose of vaccine (at least 8 weeks after having the disease) to increase their immune response and extend their period of protection.

Possible Side Effects After Vaccination

- Mild effects within 2-3 days: redness, pain and swelling at the injection site, lymph nodes under the arm, systemic reactions (fever, fatigue, headache, muscle pain). Systemic reactions are less common with the paediatric dose given to 5-11 year-olds (10µg rather than 30µg).
- Within 14 days, very low risk of myocarditis or pericarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle or lining, with symptoms such as chest pain, palpitations, shortness of breath, fatigue, fever). Among 12-17 year-olds in Quebec, 3 cases of myocarditis per 100,000 doses of the vaccine have been reported, mostly in 16-17 year-old boys after the 2nd dose. Cases were mild and responded well to treatment and rest, and symptoms were short-lived. Canadian data show a lower risk with an interval of at least 8 weeks between the two doses.
- Among the 3,000 children aged 5-11 years vaccinated during the Pfizer-BioNTech clinical trial, no cases of myocarditis or pericarditis were reported. Although this sample size is too small to exclude a risk, it is reasonable to believe that the risk is even lower than in 12-17 year-olds. Close and continuous monitoring of vaccine side effects (pharmacovigilance) continues.

Can there be long-term vaccine side effects in children?

- No study has shown that any vaccine can have side effects years after it is given. The side effects of a vaccine occur within weeks or months of administration. It is expected that the same will be true for messenger RNA vaccines.
- Messenger RNA technology has been used for years in medicine. It is a recipe given to our body to develop antibodies against a virus. The mRNA does not transform our genetic material. The body eliminates the mRNA within hours, leaving only the antibodies developed by the body and ready to fight the virus.
- Since December 2020, hundreds of millions of mRNA vaccines have been administered and possible adverse reactions are closely monitored.

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MAKING A DECISION ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S VACCINATION

How to make the right decision for your child ?

FIRST OF ALL

- Trust that as parents we want to make the best decision for our child's present and future health based on available knowledge.
- Accept that our emotions and past personal, family or group experiences with immunization or the health care system may influence our decision and lead us to have a different position than others.
- Recognize that our emotions, positions and decisions may change over time.

GETTING INFORMED

- Use the most reliable sources of information possible (see resources below).
- If necessary, talk to a trusted health care professional about our concerns.

WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS

- As parents, we weigh each day the pros and cons of the decisions we make for our children or family, and this is no different with the COVID-19 vaccination.
- The perception of these benefits and inconveniences varies from parent to parent and from family to family, and these differences must be respected as they relate to extremely diverse family landscapes, experiences and histories.
- As parents, it is important to take time to reflect and respect our pace.

TALKING ABOUT IT

- Discuss our concerns with those around us, in a climate of trust and respect for differences.
- In case of disagreement, listen to others without trying to convince, do not judge their concerns or choices.
- Protect the ties that unite us beyond our disagreements. We can live with these as we already do with other types of disagreements (political, linguistic, religious, sports, musical, etc.).

FAVOURING A COMMON POSITION BETWEEN PARENTS

- Engage in dialogue between parents and use mediation if necessary to reach a common position to protect our children from conflict and preserve family ties.
- If an agreement is not possible, explain to our child that although we as parents do not think alike, we both love him and want the best for him. If there is disagreement, the legal system can make the decision, but this should be a last resort as it is usually very harmful to the child who is in the middle of the dispute.

TALKING WITH OUR CHILD

- Talk to our child about the role of vaccines in an age-appropriate way (see resources below).
- Reassure him that as his parents, we make the decision we believe is best for him, even if other parents make different decisions.
- Listen to and reassure our child about possible fears (of transmitting the disease, of needles or shots, of being in pain, of the side effects of the vaccine, and if the decision is not to vaccinate, fear of being judged or excluded).
- If possible, get the child to feel included in the decision.
- If the decision is to vaccinate, and if the child wants to, talk with him about ways to reduce his fears on vaccination day (being with a parent or friend, talking about something he likes, distracting himself with a book or other object, choosing a clinic with animal therapy).

RESPECTING OTHER FAMILIES' CHOICE

- The choice of other parents is legitimate and must be respected just as much as our own, even if we do not share it and even if it may worry or anger us.
- Despite possible disagreements, remain caring and empathetic, and prioritize maintaining the relationship.
- Different positions around vaccination can lead to tensions and have impacts on children (loyalty conflicts, feelings of exclusion, intimidation, silence, stigmatization, loss of friendships, etc.). It is therefore important to protect children from these possible tensions by not taking a categorical position on vaccination, by not being moralistic or guilt-ridden, and by respecting parental choice, whatever it may be.

COVID-19 Resources for Children

Comics (videos):

For younger kids: *Just a Vaccine*, by Southern Ohio Medical Center
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiXDWFBJ7I>
Immunity Warriors, by Dr. Wilson, Ottawa Hospital
<https://www.immunitywarriors.com/en/home>
Valiant Vaccine Versus the Vicious Virus, by Dr. Dery and Dr. Griggs
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQiESFpq65g>

Questions and answers:

Doctor Answers Kids' Questions about COVID Vaccine, CBC Kids
<https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/watch-doctor-answers-questions-about-covid-19-vaccine-for-kids-under-12> (video)
How to Handle Your Shots Like a Champ, by Kids boost immunity
<https://kidsboostimmunity.com/champ> (info and video)
COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ (5-11 year-olds), Sick Kids Hospital, Toronto
<https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/Article?contentid=4001&language=English>

Making an Appointment

The COVID-19 vaccine is free and accessible to everyone, regardless of status, with or without a RAMQ card.

- Children ages 5 to 11 can be vaccinated in vaccination clinics (with or without an appointment) or at school.
- If you have questions about the vaccination of 5-11 year-olds, visit: quebec.ca/YOUTHvaccine
- To make an appointment, go to Clic Santé Portal portal3.clicsante.ca or call **1-877-644-4545**.