

Community Update

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Vaccines for Ages 5-11

By Cynthia Morrow, MD, MPH

Last week the Food and Drug Administration approved a COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 5-11 years old. At the time of writing this column, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) will meet soon to consider this recommendation. If the ACIP and the director of the Centers for Disease Control recommend this vaccine, parents may be able to get their children vaccinated later this week. Here are a few common questions that parents may have about the vaccine:

IF COVID-19 DISEASE IS LESS SEVERE IN CHILDREN, WHY SHOULD I GET MY CHILD VACCINATED?

Even though children are far less likely to become severely ill with COVID than adults, in the United States, over six million cases of COVID have been reported in children, almost 70,000 children have been hospitalized, over 5000 children have developed multi-system inflammatory syndrome, and approximately 800 children have died from COVID-19 so far during the pandemic. Furthermore, children can spread the disease to friends and family.

IS THE COVID VACCINE FOR CHILDREN AGED 5-11 YEARS THE SAME DOSAGE AS THE COVID VACCINE FOR ADULTS?

No. Only a third of the adult dose was needed to generate the same antibody response as in adults. Younger children will be getting this smaller dose delivered via smaller needles for smaller arms. Side effects are no different than in adults. Like other eligible groups, younger children will need to receive two doses of the vaccine 21 days apart to be considered fully vaccinated.

WHERE CAN MY CHILD GO TO RECEIVE A COVID-19 VACCINE?

The rollout for children will largely be through our Roanoke City and Alleghany Health Districts' (RCAHD) Community Vaccination Center at Valley View Mall. They will provide COVID-19 vaccine to children ages 5 to 11 by appointment only to start. We hope to offer walk-in vaccinations as soon as feasible. In addition, some pediatric and family medicine practices and pharmacies will also have vaccine available for children in this age group.

Appointments will not be available for this age group until the vaccine is authorized by the CDC. Families are encouraged to first contact their child's medical provider for an appointment. Providers will also be found through vaccinate.virginia.gov or by calling 877-VAX-IN-VA. Locally individuals call our hotline with any questions: 540-613-6597.

MY CHILD IS AFRAID OF NEEDLES AND GETTING VACCINES CAN BE AN ORDEAL. IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO CALM THEM AHEAD OF GETTING THEIR SHOT?

One idea is to practice at home with pretend shots and say, "It will hurt a little bit but then it will be all better. Let's put a Band-Aid on it!" Prepare them that nurses and staff will likely wear masks and maybe face shields.

We encourage all parents to consider getting their children vaccinated as soon as they are eligible to be vaccinated. Over the past nine months, we have seen that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. By vaccinating our children, we are protecting their health and the health of our community. As the holidays approach, what a wonderful gift we have to be thankful for!