

UW Health: Vaccine for young children fills vital gap in the vaccine landscape

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MADISON, Wis. – Recently, a COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 5 to 11 years old became available, and it opens the possibility of vaccinating the last large remaining segment of the population.

There are about 28 million children in this age group in the United States, which makes up about 8.5% of the population, and young children are susceptible to COVID-19 infection, even severe infections including hospitalization and death, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

During a six-week period in late June to mid-August, COVID-19 hospitalizations among children [increased fivefold](#), a CDC report last week showed.

The emergency use authorization of Pfizer/BioNTech's vaccine for this age group does more than protect them from illness but also their community, according to Dr. Joseph McBride, adult and pediatric infectious disease specialist, UW Health, and assistant professor of medicine and pediatrics, UW School of Medicine and Public Health.

“Vaccination of school-aged children is a major development in our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic,” he said. “Vaccination decreases the risks of the virus in the children, facilitates return of in-person school, sports and activities, all while helping prevent the spread of COVID-19 to their family members and community at large.”

Parents may still have questions, like how to schedule a vaccine appointment, and about some of the side effects of the Pfizer shot.

Scheduling an appointment at UW Health can be done at uwhealth.org/vaccine. Appointments are also available on Public Health Madison and Dane County's [website](#) and outside Dane County at vaccines.gov. If parents have made multiple appointments in an attempt to get their children vaccinated as quickly as possible, it is important to cancel any unused appointments to ensure that vaccine and appointment becomes available for others to use.

Parents should be informed about all the risks of any procedure or drug, and the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine has proven very safe and effective with very minimal side effects, McBride said.

Most side effects in the clinical trial data presented to the CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration were mild, like sore arm, fatigue and headache. Post-vaccination myocarditis, or inflammation of the muscles in the heart, is rarely reported in children older than 12 and young adults. The dose that 5 to 11-year-olds receive is a smaller dose than adolescents and adults receive and may cut down the odds of this already rare side effect, McBride said.

In the initial trials testing the Pfizer vaccine in 5 to 11-year-olds there were no reports of myocarditis, though the sample size may not have been large enough to detect a case because the possibility of this side effect is so rare, he said.

"The odds of a child of this age developing myocarditis are greater from COVID-19 itself or other viruses than as a result of this vaccine," he said. "Parents can be assured that the vaccine has been tested and is safe in this age group."

McBride's two sons, ages 5 and 7, received the COVID-19 vaccine Monday and are doing well, he said.

"Having the vaccine available to our children is such a wonderful milestone," he said. "It is an incredible gift we can give our children who have sacrificed so much during the pandemic."

McBride is available for interviews today and a recorded interview is also available.