



## *Board of Education Column*

*By Dr. Tracie Newman, School Board Member*

### **COVID-19 Vaccination in Kids**

Our best hope for ending the COVID-19 pandemic is having safe and effective vaccines. An especially crucial step in the return-to-normalcy for schools is getting educators and students vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccination has been one of the largest vaccine campaigns in history with now almost 1 billion doses given worldwide and 212 million doses in the United States. One COVID-19 vaccine is currently authorized for some adolescents and is likely to be authorized for children ages 12 years and older soon.

#### **COVID-19 Vaccines**

To date, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has granted emergency use authorization for Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines. It is expected that Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech will apply for full FDA licensure in the near future and likely have that licensure by this summer.

Pfizer-BioNTech's two-dose mRNA vaccine is currently the only COVID-19 vaccine available for ages 16 years and older. The mRNA vaccines appear to be incredibly effective and safe, putting them among the best vaccinations ever developed.

There are ongoing trials from each manufacturer in children ages 12-15 years, and there is hope that a vaccine will be available by late spring or early summer. Pfizer-BioNTech has reported efficacy of 100% with no significant safety concerns for this age range.

Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech are also conducting vaccine trials for children ages 6 months to 11 years. Health officials estimate availability for this age group in early 2022.

#### **Considerations for Children and Adolescents**

North Dakota Department of Health Field Epidemiologist and Director of Field Services Brenton Nesemeier commented, "Teenagers, by nature, are social beings. They are in a wide range of activities from sports, drama/theater, academics, and many more. They also congregate in close proximity at lunch, in the classroom, after school, and while bussing. Higher vaccination rates will ensure that these important activities can continue uninterrupted." Other important considerations include:

- While we know children tend to fare better from COVID-19 infections and are infected at lower rates, they can still be the source and recipient of outbreaks.



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- Most children have a grandparent or other person in their lives that are susceptible to worse outcomes from COVID-19.
- It is important we make vaccinating children a societal priority, if we ever hope to reach herd immunity.
- The new variants are more contagious and seem to be having a worse effect on younger people.
- Youth sports seem to be a particular magnet for outbreaks. A safe way to ensure kids can continue participating in sports and avoid disruptions in practices and games is to get them vaccinated.
- Fully vaccinated adolescents with no symptoms do not need to quarantine or be tested following an exposure to COVID-19, as their risk of infection is low.
- It is important for students to be up to date on all other childhood immunizations, as COVID-19 vaccines cannot be administered within 14 days of other vaccines.
- Pediatric seasonal influenza immunizations are recommended and fairly readily accepted. COVID-19 has hospitalized almost 15,000 children from 5/21/20 through 4/15/21 (on par with a typical flu year for influenza) and has killed almost 300 children (more than double a typical flu year for influenza).
- Common vaccine side effects: injection site pain, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, fever. More data on side effects and potential reasons to forgo a vaccine for children will become available during the FDA approval process.
- While health officials continue to study the efficacy of vaccines on circulating variants and whether vaccinated individuals transmit the virus, children should continue to take precautions like wearing masks and physical distancing even after being vaccinated.

Infectious disease physician and vaccine expert Dr. Paul Carson states, “The only way we can come close to getting back to normal is if a large majority of us are vaccinated. Otherwise, expect ongoing mini-outbreaks, more variants, more disruptions and cancellations, and potential re-implementation of mask requirements.” Considering children under 18 make up around 24% of the U.S. population, we will need a large majority of them vaccinated to get there.

### **Community Vaccine Availability**

COVID-19 vaccines for kids 16 years and older are currently available through Fargo Cass Public Health and Essentia Health. Vaccine administration by Sanford Health for kids 16 years and older will start on April 22 at the Moorhead Clinic and May 3 at the Sanford Southwest Pediatric Clinic (both primary care and urgent care).



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**Resources:**

<https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/AAP%20and%20CHA%20-%20Children%20and%20COVID-19%20State%20Data%20Report%204.15.21%20FINAL.pdf>

<https://www.aappublications.org/news/2021/04/08/covid-vaccine-children-aap-guidance-040821>

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html#children>

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/covid-19-vaccine-for-children/>

<https://deadline.com/2021/04/los-angeles-has-5-current-covid-19-outbreaks-involving-schools-all-associated-with-youth-sports-1234739894/>

