

Our Vision: Healthy People in Healthy Communities
Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties

COVID-19 vaccines are an important step to protect young children

Earlier this week, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices unanimously recommended Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for children age 5 to 11 years old. This is good news for many parents who have been anxiously awaiting approval of a vaccine to protect their children from the virus that causes COVID-19.

The South Heartland District Health Department and local health care providers, including pediatric and family practice specialists, are hearing from parents who have questions about the vaccine and want to make the best choices for their kids' health. So, what are the facts about the COVID vaccine? We'll get started answering a few frequently-asked questions here.

Why should children get the vaccine?

First, the virus that causes COVID-19 is still spreading in our communities and the transmission level has been continuing at high levels in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties. While most children who test positive for COVID-19 will have mild symptoms or no symptoms, some children are more at risk for severe symptoms. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children with certain [underlying health conditions](#) may be more at risk of severe illness and complications from COVID. Conditions that may increase risk include obesity, diabetes, asthma or chronic lung disease, sickle cell disease, or immunosuppression. Some children without underlying conditions can also become very ill and need hospitalization.

Second, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) provides information on their [healthychildren.org website](#) about a rare but serious health condition called multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C). MIS-C seems to be linked to COVID-19 and children with MIS-C can be very ill with fever and inflammation in their bodies that can affect their heart, brain, lungs and other organs.

And, third, some children may experience COVID-19 symptoms more than a month after they were first infected. This post-COVID-19 syndrome (also called long-haul COVID-19 or long-COVID-19) may even develop in children who had very mild or no symptoms during their initial infection and after they have tested negative. The symptoms may continue on for many months or longer.

According to the AAP, the most common symptoms of long-haul COVID include:

- Fatigue and poor physical endurance
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating, also known as "brain fog"
- Cough
- Trouble breathing
- Joint or muscle pain
- Chest or stomach pain
- Mood changes
- Headache
- Fever
- Heart palpitations
- Loss of or changes in smell or taste
- Lightheadedness when standing up

So, what's the take-home message? Parents need to know that while many children infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 may have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, some children may be more at risk for severe illness and others could develop symptoms of long-COVID sometime later, after the initial infection has resolved.

Layers of prevention, like washing hands, staying home when we are ill, wearing a mask, keeping some distance between ourselves and others, are important for protecting children from the effects of COVID-19. Vaccines are the best layer of prevention we have against childhood diseases. The recently approved and recommended COVID-19 pediatric vaccine for children ages 5-11 is over 90% effective at providing protection against COVID-19 and post-COVID conditions, such as long COVID.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for my child?

Yes! Tens of thousands of volunteers, including some in our own South Heartland region, participated in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines. These clinical trials showed the vaccine was safe and effective in children, which is a requirement before the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) will consider authorizing the vaccine for emergency use.

Will my child experience side effects after the COVID-19 vaccine?

As with any vaccine, children (and adults) may experience symptoms that show the vaccine is doing its job to activate your immune response. Some children may not experience any side effects at all and others might experience one or more of the following: tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, vomiting, pain at the injection site (sore arm), especially after the second shot. These mild to moderate short-lasting symptoms will go away on their own within a day or two.

When will the COVID-19 vaccine be available in our area?

South Heartland is receiving the first shipments of Pfizer pediatric vaccine for our area and working to distribute it to our approved COVID-19 vaccine providers at primary care and pediatric healthcare provider offices in our four counties by early in the week of November 8. Once the vaccine is distributed and certain other requirements are in place, vaccine will be available at locations throughout the district. South Heartland's [vaccine webpage](#) will be updated to let the public know where and when pediatric doses will be available in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties.

Where can I learn more?

South Heartland encourages ALL eligible family members to get the COVID-19 vaccine. If parents want to know more, they can check out the great videos and resources at [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) or talk with their child's health care provider. Healthychildren.org is a website for parents produced by the American Academy of Pediatrics, an organization of health care providers who specialize in children's health. For information about where to find COVID-19 vaccine or where to get a COVID-19 test, visit the local health department website: southheartlandhealth.org.

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