

Q&A for Parents: The Bivalent COVID-19 Vaccine for Children 5 years and Older

On Wednesday, October 12, 2022, Rochelle P. Walensky, M.D., M.P.H., Director of the CDC, signed a “decision memo” expanding the use of an updated bivalent COVID-19 vaccine booster for children from 5-11 years of age.

These updated vaccines add Omicron BA.4/BA.5 spike protein components to the current vaccine. This helps to restore protection that has decreased since any previous vaccinations and targets the recent Omicron variants that are more easily transmitted and more likely to evade previous immunity.

“The FDA’s authorization of the bivalent booster vaccines and the CDC’s recommendation is the next step in our country’s vaccination program, which has helped protect children and adults against severe disease and death.”

For more information on the CDC’s recommendations, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/s1012-COVID-19-Vaccines.html>

or

https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/mediosdecomunicacion/comunicados/d_vacunas-contra-covid19_101222.html

Q: What does bivalent mean?

A: In this instance it means that one single dose of the vaccine provides immunity for two diseases or variants. This particular vaccine contains a component for the original strain of SARS-CoV-2, and another component for the Omicron variant BA.4/BA.5.

Q: What does monovalent mean?

A: In this instance it means the vaccine provides immunity for one disease or variant. The original COVID-19 vaccine contained a component for the original strain of SARS-CoV-2. This did not include the Omicron variant which is more prevalent today.

Q: My child has already been vaccinated. Why should my child get a booster?

A: Research has indicated that immunity from the COVID-19 vaccines can decrease over time. An additional booster provides increased protection against severe disease and death as immunity wanes.

Q: My child has never received a COVID-19 vaccine. Can my child get this bivalent vaccine booster?

A: The answer is “no.” The bivalent vaccine is not authorized as a **primary series** vaccination. It only includes one dose for children 5 years of age and older, and it can only be given at least two months after your child has received the primary vaccine series with any other approved monovalent COVID-19 vaccine, or as a booster dose at least two months after your child has received the most recent booster dose with any approved monovalent vaccine.

If you would like for your child to have the primary series vaccine for COVID-19, please contact your pediatrician or primary care provider to schedule an appointment. It is not too late to be protected from COVID-19.

Q: Everyone in my family, including my children have already had COVID-19, why should they get a booster now?

A: Research has shown that individuals can be infected with COVID-19 multiple times as the virus mutates and changes over time. An additional booster can again provide that additional amount of immunity protection against severe disease and death. “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that children receive vaccination even if they have had COVID-19.”

Q: There are two different vaccines approved as a bivalent vaccine for children. What is the difference between these two boosters?

A: Previously Pfizer's monovalent vaccine was given in two doses. Today, Pfizer's bivalent booster vaccine can be given as a single dose for children 5-11 years of age. This booster can be given at least two months after completion of the primary vaccine series, or after any of the approved monovalent COVID-19 vaccine booster.

For more information about the Pfizer BioNTech bivalent booster visit:

[Pfizer BioNTech Bivalent Booster for Children 5 Years of Age and Older.](https://www.pfizer.com/5-11-childrens-bio-ntech-bivalent-booster)

Moderna's bivalent booster vaccine is also given in one dose and is available under emergency use authorization for children six years of age and older. "The updated booster is a new vaccine (outside of the primary series vaccines) that is custom-designed to help protect against multiple COVID-19 variants—and can help provide greater protection against an ever-changing virus."

For more information about the Moderna bivalent booster visit:

https://www.makeityourvaccine.com/faqs?tc=ps_u80iej9&cc=4006

Q: How do I know which one is best for my child?

A: Distribution of both vaccines has begun and will be available at pediatric practices, pharmacies, federally Qualified Health Centers, local health departments, clinics and other locations throughout Georgia. If you have questions about either of these vaccines, reach out to your pediatrician or primary care provider who can help guide you in your decision. It is possible that locations may not have both options available, so be certain to ask which vaccine is being provided if it is important in your decision making process.

Q: What kind of side effects have been seen in children?

A: The side effects in children have been similar to those seen in adults, as well as those seen in the primary series vaccines. The most common side effects were pain at the injection site, irritability and drowsiness. Reactions were mostly mild or moderate. If you have other questions about side effects, your pediatrician or primary care provider can help answer those questions.

Q: My child also needs other vaccines. Can I schedule the COVID-19 vaccine booster at the same time as other vaccines?

A: Being up to date with all vaccinations is particularly important as many children, fell behind their regular vaccination schedule during the pandemic. If your child has not received the COVID-19 vaccine at all, now is an important time to schedule that before the winter season begins when respiratory illnesses are seen at a higher rate. It is expected that the Omicron variant BA.4/BA.5 will circulate through communities this fall and winter.

In addition, it is important for your child to be up to date on all vaccines which help prevent infectious diseases such as flu, mumps, measles, chicken pox, etc. Reach out to your pediatrician or primary care provider for more information about the timing of all vaccines. Your child's healthcare provider is the best person to guide you in scheduling the vaccine booster with other vaccines.

Sources:

[Pfizer BioNTech Bivalent Booster for Children 5 Years of Age and Older](https://www.pfizer.com/5-11-childrens-bio-ntech-bivalent-booster)

https://www.makeityourvaccine.com/faqs?tc=ps_u80iej9&cc=4006

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/s1012-COVID-19-Vaccines.html>