

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

About the COVID-19 vaccine for children with autism



Q: What COVID-19 vaccines are available for people with autism?

A: All three vaccines are considered safe and effective. Pfizer is available for people ages 5 and up. Moderna is available for people ages 18 and up. If you can't get a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine for medical reasons or because you simply prefer not to, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is available to people ages 18 and up.

If you're the caregiver of a child with autism who is not yet eligible for a vaccine, the best way you can lower their risk of getting COVID-19 is to get vaccinated yourself. You'll lower the chance of becoming sick and passing the virus to your child.

Q: When will the COVID-19 vaccine be available for younger children?

A: Clinical trials for both Pfizer and Moderna are currently underway for children as young as six months old. For more information about when COVID-19 vaccines will be available to children under 5, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

Q: Why are people with autism at higher risk of COVID-19?

A: They are at higher risk because they are more likely to live in a group setting, be unable to communicate about having symptoms, or have trouble understanding or following safety measures.

People with autism may also have other health problems like heart disease, obesity, and diabetes that put them at higher risk for COVID-19, so they are encouraged to get vaccinated.

Q: How do I know the COVID-19 vaccine is safe for my child?

A: Clinical trials with tens of thousands of participants demonstrated COVID-19 vaccine safety and effectiveness for adults and youth ages 5 and older, and the FDA approved emergency use authorization based on those extensive trials. Millions of people in the U.S. have received COVID-19 vaccines. Intense safety monitoring remains ongoing.

The vaccines are just as safe for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as they are for others. People with disabilities, including autism, were included in the clinical trials of the vaccines.

Q: Is there a link between COVID-19 vaccines and autism?

A: No, but an infection of any kind during pregnancy has been linked to a greater risk of ASD in children—another incentive to be vaccinated.

A study of U.S. participants published in *Autism Research* in October 2019, found that maternal infection that included fever in the second trimester of pregnancy was associated with a twofold risk of ASD in children. A Swedish longitudinal study published in 2019 in *JAMA Psychiatry* found that fetal exposure to maternal infection was linked to a greater risk of an autism diagnosis in children.

For more information: CovidVaccineWA.org

washingtonautismalliance.org | 425-894-7231 | [@WashingtonAutismAlliance](https://www.instagram.com/WashingtonAutismAlliance)



Q: Will an mRNA vaccine like Pfizer or Moderna change my child's DNA?

A: No, in fact mRNA vaccines don't interact with your DNA at all. Once the mRNA has done its job—instructing your immune system to protect you from COVID-19—your body breaks it down and eliminates it.

Under no circumstances can the COVID-19 vaccine infect you with the virus that causes COVID-19, or affect the DNA of a child born to a vaccinated person.

Q: What side effects should we be prepared for?

A: Like many vaccines, COVID-19 vaccines can lead to short-term side effects. Some people may have no side effects at all, while others may experience the following:

- Pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site
- Fatigue
- Fever and/or chills
- Nausea
- Headache
- Muscle pain

These side effects typically go away in a day or two and can be managed with over-the-counter medicines. Long-term side effects are very unlikely. Allergic reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine are rare, but this is why you will need to wait in the clinic for 15 to 30 minutes after the vaccination. If you have a reaction, there are medications to quickly treat it.

Q: Does the COVID-19 vaccine cause myocarditis?

A: A very small number of adolescents and young adults have developed mild cases of myocarditis, or heart inflammation, after getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

This appears to be an extremely rare side effect that has affected mostly males after the second dose of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. These cases typically occur within four days after vaccination.

While the possibility of myocarditis is concerning, it can usually be treated easily with anti-inflammatory medications. The risks posed by contracting COVID-19 far outweigh the risk of myocarditis.

From the American Academy of Pediatrics: "Thousands of children have been hospitalized, and hundreds have died after being infected with COVID-19. Some children who have recovered still experience lingering symptoms. In fact, getting infected with COVID-19 itself is much more likely to cause myocarditis than the vaccine."

Q: How can caregivers prepare their loved ones with autism for a COVID-19 vaccine?

A: Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have already faced isolation, changes to their routines, and disruptions to their therapeutic care and education. The process of getting vaccinated poses an added challenge, especially since many times the shots aren't being given in a typical doctor's office setting.

Depending on the person with ASD's ability to understand and express language, caregivers should try to explain the reason for the shot, what to expect at each step, and perhaps even do a practice run.

The Autism Society of America has published social stories on its website that may be helpful to someone with autism. You can download them at www.covid19.autism-society.org to help prepare your loved one for the COVID-19 vaccines, testing, and more.

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