

COVID-19 YOUTH VACCINATION AGES 12-15

September 2021



Young people aged 12 and older will soon be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, allowing more Cook Islanders to be protected from the virus. This Q and A is a guide to fact-based messaging to help answer various questions regarding vaccinations for youth.

For parents-caregivers

Which company is providing the vaccine and how do I know the vaccine is safe?

Medsafe – the New Zealand agency that checks that medications are safe – has given the Pfizer vaccine approval for use with people aged 12 years and over. They only give consent for using a vaccine once they are satisfied it has met strict standards for safety, efficacy and quality.

The Pfizer vaccine is an mRNA vaccine. When the vaccine is injected, mRNA – a single-stranded molecule that carries genetic code from DNA in a cell's nucleus to ribosomes, the cell's protein-making machinery – enters a body's cell and prompts the cell to build copies of spike proteins. These spike proteins are the bumps that protrude from the surface of coronavirus particles. The body's immune system then learns to spot these spike proteins and produces antibodies that block the virus from entering healthy cells in the future.

Studies show that vaccine recipients achieve immunity about two weeks after receiving the vaccine's second dose. Scientists are still learning about how long that immunity will last.

Does a parent or caregiver need to provide consent?

A parent or care giver's consent together with the child's consent is preferable if the child is competent to consent.

How much does the vaccine cost?

The vaccine is free for all Cook Islanders, resident, and work permit holders.

Why should I vaccinate my child?

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect ourselves and our families. The more of us who are vaccinated in our community, the greater our immunity. We want to protect young people and their families from COVID-19.

Why is the vaccine only for 12 years and over? When will vaccines be available for younger children?

Vaccine trials and approvals commonly begin with older, more vulnerable populations then extend to younger ages. The 12-15 years-old were the next group to be prioritised because they are most similar to adults. Medsafe has now approved the Pfizer vaccine for use with people aged 12 years and older.

Clinical trials in people younger than twelve are taking place now.

Is vaccination compulsory?

Vaccination is not compulsory at this time in the Cook Islands, but the world is changing, and vaccination may well become a need for travelling or school enrolment.

Te Marae Ora's health objective is to get as many of our 12–15-year-olds vaccinated and therefore protected against COVID-19 as possible.

Where and when can I get my child vaccinated?

Your child will be vaccinated at Rarotonga hospital, out of school hours. The date and times will be announced once Te Marae Ora has confirmation of when the vaccines will be arriving here.

Can we be vaccinated as a family?

Yes, absolutely. It is important all family members get vaccinated once eligible to help build immunity in our households and community. Unvaccinated parents will be most welcome to come along with their child/children.

Is there a consent form?

There are two (2) consent forms; first is the Cook Islands School Vaccination consent form and the second is the Pfizer- BioNTech COVID -19 (Comirnaty) form. TMO is planning to use both forms for the parents to consent.

What side effects have there been in 12–15-year-olds? Where can I see the research?

Some people might get side effects. This can happen with all medicines. Side effects for young people are similar to those experienced by adults.

The most common side effects are:

- a sore arm from your injection – you can put a cold cloth or ice pack on it to feel better
- a headache
- feeling tired
- feeling feverish or sweaty

These side effects are mild and should not last long. There will be health professionals at every vaccination site to assist if you do have a reaction.

As with any other vaccine, medical experts remind us that mild symptoms are normal and are a sign that the body is building immunity and it is important to remember that the vaccines have proven to be safe and effective for all of us.

It is important for those who receive the Pfizer vaccine to return for their second dose in order to gain the full protection the vaccine has to offer.

Do the vaccines have the same effectiveness in youth as in adults?

Yes, the vaccine has the same effectiveness in youth as in the adults. Clinical trials have proved the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and 100 percent effective in protecting against severe illness, hospitalisation and death in those aged 12-15.

If my child gets the vaccine, can they still get COVID-19?

It is possible but far less likely. Your child can still get a COVID-19 infection and be a carrier, but they will have a mild infection. The vaccine will prevent them from getting a severe infection requiring hospitalisation.

What if my child has had reactions to other vaccines – should they still get this vaccine?

Allergic reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine are rare and very few people have had severe adverse reactions. If your teen normally has allergic reactions to the flu vaccine or other severe allergies, it is worth discussing with your health care provider before they get their first shot.

What if my child has a pre-existing condition, is there an increased risk?

As above it will be best to discuss this with your child's health care provider.

How long is the vaccine effective?

How long the vaccine will provide immunity from the virus is still unknown. Scientists are hard at work studying this and to determine if and when a booster will be necessary.

Does the 12-15 age group get smaller dosages than adults?

The Pfizer vaccine dosage will be the same dosage already safely administered to millions of people around the world, including over 11,000 here in the Cook Islands.

Will the vaccine alter my child's DNA?

No, the vaccine does not change our DNA, nor does it contain any COVID-19 virus.

My teen is afraid of getting any vaccine. How do I convince them this is the right thing to do?

It is normal for kids to be concerned about any kind of immunisation. And there has been more conversation around the COVID-19 vaccine than probably any other vaccination, with an overwhelming amount of misinformation out there.

It is important for young people in this age group to be informed with fact over fiction. Young people are frequently exposed to disinformation on social media, and many need to understand the science behind the vaccine and that it does not contain the virus or a chip. They should also know the injection is almost painless and an important step toward helping end the pandemic.

What should my child expect at the COVID-19 vaccination appointment?

After checking in at the hospital and taking care of paperwork, your teen or child will be asked some questions about their health. The shot will be administered into their arm – the arm on the side they do not use for writing. After receiving the shot they will be monitored for 20 minutes to ensure there are no adverse reactions. They will receive a card indicating when they received their vaccine and when they will receive their second shot.

Should my child stay home from school after the COVID-19 vaccine?

If they have a fever, the teen or child should stay home. Beyond that, so long as they are feeling well, there is no need to limit activities.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine affect my child's fertility?

Definitely not. Because it is an mRNA vaccine (see explanation above), the vaccine does not get incorporated into or change the DNA of the body's cells in any way. There is no reason to worry that the vaccine will affect fertility or future offspring.

For more information, please visit www.health.gov.ck