Protecting our Children from COVID-19: How Texans can help

Vaccination is the best way to protect our families from COVID-19. Wearing masks and social distancing are additional proven methods to slow the spread of COVID-19. Because of the emergence of highly contagious variants, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that everyone over the age of two, even if vaccinated, wear a mask indoors in public. (1)

Why should adults and children wear a mask?
- To protect children who are not eligible to be vaccinated from those who might carry the disease.
- To prevent the spread of new COVID-19 variants that are causing a surge in the U.S. and globally. The Delta variant is 200% more transmissible and has 1,000% more virus particles than the original strain of COVID-19, meaning the virus is more easily and quickly spread. (2) Children and unvaccinated adults are at greatest risk. It is still too early to know how the Omicron variant compares, but it appears to spread more easily though cause milder symptoms.
- Although vaccinated people are protected from severe illness and death from COVID-19, they can still spread the virus to others (though at much lower rates). (3)

The only way to stop these emerging variants of COVID-19 is to:
- Get vaccinated
- Wear a mask
- Social distance

On October 29, 2021, the FDA authorized the emergency use of the COVID-19 Pfizer vaccine for children ages 5-11. (4) Children 12 years and older have been eligible to receive the COVID-19 Pfizer vaccine in Texas since May 12, 2021. (5)

- The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and have been developed and used under the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history, including studies in children. (6)
- The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for children and adolescents ages 5 and up, as a 2-dose series taken 3 weeks apart. The dose for children ages 5-11 is one-third of the dosage of the vaccine for older adolescents and adults.
- Nearly 17 million, or 62.4%, of the eligible population in Texas is fully vaccinated. (7) Rates of vaccination across cities and counties in Texas are highly variable.
- To reach population level immunity, 80%-94% of Texans need to be immune by vaccination or natural infection (8-9). Evidence suggests vaccine immunity is substantially stronger than natural infection.

Most children are not protected from COVID-19.
Nearly 2/3 of Texans ages 5-19 do not have COVID-19 antibodies. (10)

Most children who are eligible for the vaccine are not vaccinated.
Only 26% of Texans ages 12-17 are vaccinated. (11)
As of January 20, 2022, more than 10 million child COVID-19 cases were reported, representing 18.4% of all cases in the U.S. (12)

The week of January 20, 2022 was the 24th week in a row that the number of new child COVID-19 cases was greater than 100,000, and in that week, of all the reported COVID-19 cases, children represented 25.5%. (12) In Texas, you can check your county transmission rate here: https://sph.uth.edu/dept/bads/covid19-dashboard. (13)

Children can still experience severe outcomes from COVID-19.

Nationwide, as of September 2021, among children and adolescents ages 0-17 years: (14-15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More than 266,000</th>
<th>Nearly 650</th>
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<td>had been hospitalized with COVID-19</td>
<td>had died from COVID-19</td>
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Child hospitalizations due to COVID-19 were at an all-time high in January 2022. (16) Among adolescents aged 12-17 who were hospitalized with COVID-19, nearly 1/3 required intensive care unit (ICU) admission. (17)

- In some areas of high and increasing cases, children’s hospitals have been over capacity because of lack of beds and staff shortages. (18)
- Children may experience Long COVID-19. Estimates suggest 10%-45% of children under age 12 experience COVID-19 symptoms lasting longer than five weeks. (19-20)
- Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) is a rare but serious disease associated with COVID-19. (21) As of January 3, 2022, there were 6,431 cases of MIS-C and 55 deaths in the U.S. (22)
- Children with underlying health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or obesity and babies under 1 year old are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 compared to children without underlying conditions or older than 1 year old. (23-24)
- Children of color are disproportionately impacted by severe outcomes from COVID-19. (15, 25)
- A child is more likely to experience serious symptoms from COVID-19 than from the vaccine. (15)

The vaccine is safe - please protect yourself, your families, and your neighbors.

Children have a right to be safe.

There are approximately 2 million children under the age of 5 in Texas. These children are not yet eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. (26)

- 2.7 million children under age 12 attended Texas public school (K-6th grade) in the 2020-2021 academic school year. (27) Children attending public school in the 2021-2022 school year will likely be exposed to COVID-19 in school settings. This may be exacerbated by the new and highly contagious variants.
- Because children do not have the autonomy to obtain the COVID-19 vaccine, it is up to the public to protect them - by getting vaccinated, wearing masks, and social distancing. These preventive actions will protect children by reducing transmission in the community.
Protect our children.

Children belong back in school, among their peers and with their teachers. Take preventive actions.

- **Get vaccinated.** For yourself, for your family, for those around you, for those who cannot get vaccinated.

- **Get the booster shot.** Booster shots are recommended for those 12 years and older who are fully vaccinated.

- Protect young children by wearing a mask, social distancing, and washing your hands regularly - even if you are vaccinated.

- Vaccinate your children if they are age 5 or older, and vaccinate your younger children when the vaccine is approved for their age group.

- Ask those who care for or teach your children to get vaccinated.

- Monitor the projected risk at your child’s school here: (30) https://covid-19.tacc.utexas.edu/dashboards/school-risk/

- Check your antibody status by participating in Texas CARES: (31) https://sph.uth.edu/projects/texascares

For resources on where to get a COVID-19 vaccine, see below: (32)

- **COVID-19 Vaccination Hub Providers**

- **CDC’s Federal Retail Pharmacy Program**
  https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/retail-pharmacy-program/participating-pharmacies.html

- **Texas Vaccine Scheduler**
  https://getthevaccine.dshs.texas.gov/txces/s/?language=en_US

- **DSHS Summer Pop-Ups**
REFERENCES


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