

COVID-19 Vaccine and Kids: Q + A with Dr. Andrea Singh

TRANSCRIPT

Hi there. My name is Andrea Singh and I'm a pediatrician and a mom of two boys. I'm happy to be here today to talk to you guys a little bit more about COVID vaccine for kids and answer any questions that you might have.

[Why do my kids need to get vaccinated? Isn't me being vaccinated enough?]

Yeah, Really great question. I mean, a lot of times what we do for parents is enough to protect their kids. In this instance, it actually isn't quite enough. If kids themselves get sick, they can bring that sickness into the home. And if you have vulnerable individuals, like grandparents or anybody that's elderly or even really young babies in your house, the kids that are otherwise healthy can bring COVID disease in. The other piece of that is that COVID disease can actually have significant illness effects for kids. You know, we're lucky that most of the time COVID, presents as a mild cold for most kids. But unfortunately, there have also been children that have a significant disease, long hauler effect, where they're not better after several weeks and certainly not back up to the energy level or ability that they were before the disease. And unfortunately, some kids have even died.

[Have enough studies been done on the vaccine? It feels new.]

Yeah, COVID vaccine is a newer vaccine. One of the good things about COVID vaccine is that uh, now there have been hundreds of millions of people across the world that have received this vaccine. And so we're taking a lot of that information from what's already been done. And also, there's been a lot of research on what can be done for kids and what's safe to do for kids. One of the reasons why it took so long for the 5 to 11 year-old vaccine to get approved is they were looking specifically at what's safe for that age group and not just assuming that because it works for adults, it works for kids. As a result of that information, actually, we were able to figure out that a little bit of a decreased dose is actually the right thing for kids in that 5-11 year-old age group. And that was enough to mount a good immune response to protect kids but to minimize some of the potential side effects. So, yeah, I think there has been a lot of research done and it is safe.

[What is the size of the dose? What about a small 5 year-old or a larger 11 year-old?]

The dose currently that has been approved for the 5 to 11 year old kids, there's only one vaccine that's available, going to be available in the United States right now, that may change in the future, but it's the Pfizer vaccine and it's a third of the dose of what we give to adults. So a lot of parents have asked that exact question about, "What about the size of my kid?" And in pediatrics, sometimes we change medicine dosing based on size and sometimes it's about age. With the COVID vaccine, it's about age and the development of your immune system. And so even a small five or six year-old or a small 11 year old, has the same development of their immune system as does a larger child of that same age. So it's okay for the big 11 year-olds to get the 5 to 11 year-old dose and the small five year-olds to get that dose as well.

[What kinds of side effects can happen after getting the COVID-19 vaccine? How does that compare to getting COVID-19 disease?]

So the vast majority of kids have had side effects with the COVID vaccine that have been really similar to other vaccines. A sore arm, some tiredness, maybe a day or two of not feeling well. Of course, there's

been a lot of information out there and a lot of speculation about heart inflammation related to COVID vaccine. And I think it's worth talking about a little bit. So, there are these medical terms that are often used “myocarditis”, “pericarditis”. Basically, it's inflammation around the heart and different parts of the heart. And what we do know is that it's much more likely to have that inflammation around the heart if you get COVID disease as compared to COVID vaccine. So, saying that you don't want your child to have myocarditis and that's why you don't want to have the vaccine may not hold as much water when you think about the fact that the disease is what's really giving the most people the heart inflammation and the vaccine will protect you against that.

[What are COVID-19 vaccine breakthrough cases?]

Yeah, I think it's worth talking a little bit about breakthrough cases of COVID disease after you've been vaccinated. Now, the first thing to know is that no vaccine is perfect and breakthrough cases can happen, that doesn't mean the vaccine is worthless, at all. And the second thing to know is that, what we found with COVID disease with breakthrough cases is that the illness tends to be a lot less severe. One thing that I kind of think about with my patients is, if you've got a breakthrough case of COVID disease after you're vaccinated, imagine what it would have been like for you if you got COVID disease and you weren't vaccinated. Potentially that person might have been really, really sick. We also know that there's a lot of information coming out that people that have breakthrough cases shed COVID disease less. So, the transmission likelihood is less with breakthrough cases than actually with disease.

[Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for young girls? Does the vaccine cause infertility?]

So, one other consideration that often comes up is that parents are concerned that by getting their daughters COVID vaccine, it may affect future fertility. And that was information – disinformation, that was on the internet and spread like wildfire. So, a lot of parents have that question and I think it's a really important one to ask, instead of worrying about it and not asking the question. The truth is, we've looked into this quite a bit as that rumor started to spread and research shows that there actually is no effect on fertility for women. Best practical example, we have of that is that there have been lots of women that have gotten pregnant since getting the COVID vaccine or who have gotten the COVID vaccine during pregnancy and gone on to have healthy births. So I'm very comfortable saying that COVID vaccine is safe for young ladies and it's really important.

[How do mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna) work?]

So another question that a lot of parents have, relates to whether COVID vaccine can affect your D. N. A. And you know, I think some of those questions started because the COVID vaccine that we currently have available for kids is Pfizer vaccine, which is an mRNA vaccine. Now, these are complicated science terms and I don't think that it's really critical that we go into the mechanisms. But what you do need to know is that the vaccine does not get incorporated into anybody's DNA. The mRNA, the “m” stands for messenger. And really it's just bringing the vaccine information into the cell and then it dissolves, the mRNA particle dissolves. And so it's not – that piece is not staying permanently in your body.

[Why do pediatricians keep pushing getting vaccinated?]

I have actually had a few families ask me about what the medical community stake in these vaccines is and why pediatricians and other health care providers are really focusing on COVID vaccine, when maybe it's newer. The truth is that as a pediatrician, I've dedicated my career to protecting kids. I would not suggest anything for any patient or any community member that I wasn't comfortable recommending for my own family. So, that's why I've got my kids vaccinated and recommended that all my family members and loved ones get vaccinated. And I really think that it's the right thing to do for most families out there. And that's why I recommend it to all of my patients.

[How does vaccination change COVID-19 close contacts at school or activities?]

So, so far we've talked about, you know, reasons for kids to get the vaccine. But there's one other thing that we haven't mentioned yet that I think is really important and that relates to getting them back to normal and getting them back to real-life kid activities and fun stuff. You know, if you get COVID vaccine, it can help minimize the kids' time and quarantine. So, for example, lots of us have had kids that have had to be sent home from school, if they've had a contact at school that has been positive. If your child is fully vaccinated and they have one of those school exposures or activity exposures at sports or something, then, if they are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated, you don't have to do the quarantine, which is a big deal. It allows our kids to be kids, and to be healthier in terms of participating in normal stuff. The more we can minimize that, the better for all of our kids.

[My kids hate shots. Any tips for preparing them?]

Yeah. My kids are not big fans of vaccines and shots either. And I think that's natural, right. None of us really enjoy getting poked. I think there are a few different things that we can think about when we're preparing our kids for getting any sort of vaccination. One is, that kids are really smart and they're aware of what's happening. So it doesn't help to spring things on them, like last minute. You want to talk to them about kind of what's going on. Some kids that are anxious may not need one week heads up, but they may, you know, the same day, we should be talking about what's going to happen and why it's important to get the vaccine. Another thing that is important to think about is distraction is a really great technique if your child is getting a shot. So helping to have something there that will make them feel comfortable. Whether it's a favorite stuffy or – you know – pediatricians are not super big fans of screen time, but sometimes something on a screen on your phone while they're getting the vaccine can really help take their mind off of it. The last thing I would say, is that kids learn from example. So, if you go into the vaccine opportunity thinking about it as an opportunity and are excited about it, the kids are gonna be less fearful. If you go in acting like you're really scared or that you're nervous, they're gonna sense that and they're gonna be more nervous. It's also a great time if you haven't gotten your vaccine yet to model that behavior and get your vaccine at the same time potentially that your child is getting there.

[When should I bring in my child to get vaccinated?]

Practically, a lot of parents wonder about when to bring their kids in for the vaccine, just like any other vaccine, and when to minimize side effects or that affecting other activities are going to school. The truth is that most of the time kids do just fine the next day after COVID vaccine and oftentimes it does not affect their ability to do their normal thing. In fact, thinking back, I think I brought my kids in on a weekday and they went to school the next day and didn't have any problems. If you're really nervous about that, you certainly could plan to get your vaccine on a Friday or a Saturday when the next day they're probably going to be home. Another thing to think about as we go into the holiday season for us here, is that the timing of the vaccine will be important if you want your child to be fully vaccinated prior to any family events or gatherings. So with COVID vaccine, which is the one that's approved for kids five through 18. They can get the first dose, then there's a space of three weeks, and then they get the second dose and it's only two weeks after that second dose where they actually have full immunity. So you really want to be thinking ahead and thinking about that five week window to full protection as you're planning?

[The discussions around COVID-19 vaccines have been complicated. Where should parents go for accurate information?]

It's sometimes hard to know exactly what the right thing to do is for your kids. And I think, you know, when we're talking about health care decisions in particular, it's really a great idea to seek out expert advice. Ask your pediatrician, ask your family medicine doctor or another trusted healthcare provider that knows your child and can help you figure out what your fears are about COVID vaccine. What your

fears are about COVID disease and what the risks and benefits for your kiddo will be. Each of our kids is different and we have to make the right decision for them. If you don't have somebody that you are personally connected with, looking at different websites such as healthy Children dot org, which is from the American Academy Pediatrics or the CDC can be helpful. I think that COVID vaccine is the right choice for the vast majority of children. But I think getting your questions answered will help make that decision easier for you.

I wanted to thank you for taking the time to watch this video today. I think the decisions around COVID vaccine, as we mentioned earlier, are really challenging and it is hard to know what the right thing to do for you as a parent and your child is. We have to remember is that most of us want the same thing which is healthy kids and getting the vaccine allows us to move in that direction and allows us to get back to what we felt like it was normal, pre-COVID and get our kids back to all of their activities. So, I appreciate you watching and keep sending us your questions.

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