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CDC Adding COVID-19 Vaccines to Child Immunization Schedule

By [Wendy Wisner](#) | Published on November 03, 2022

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Key Takeaways

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended adding COVID-19 vaccines to the childhood immunization schedule.

[\[1\]](#)

The CDC makes vaccine schedule recommendations, but only the states can mandate them. ^[1]

On October 20, 2022, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended adding the [pediatric COVID-19 vaccine](#) to the childhood immunization schedule. At this time, there is no information about what that recommendation will look like in terms of vaccine timing, number of doses, and booster shots. According to the CDC, answers to these questions will be released in early 2023. ^[2]

When this news came out, many parents were understandably unsure about what this meant. Will their child be required to get the COVID vaccine in order to attend school? Will COVID boosters be an annual requirement for kids? As the CDC notes, these are simply recommendations—only states have the power to mandate vaccines for school or otherwise. ^[2]

Still, many questions still linger. We reached out to experts to help us unpack this news and to help us understand how child immunization schedules work and what the purpose is.

Related: [How Will the COVID-19 Vaccine Affect My Child's Regular Shot Schedule?](#)

Why are Childhood Vaccine Schedules Important?

The CDC's job is to keep track of infectious diseases and make determinations about what vaccines are important for children to receive. "The current childhood vaccine schedule has been carefully crafted and extensively studied," says [Rebekah Diamond, MD](#), assistant professor of pediatrics at Columbia University, and author of the book [Parent Like A Pediatrician](#). ^[3]

serious illness. “We know vaccine uptake leads to happy, healthy children through data,” she describes. “As a pediatrician, I’ve also seen it firsthand—treating a devastating disease or even witnessing childhood death from vaccine-preventable disease.” [4]

“

Childhood vaccination schedules are the guidepost for all providers to refer to when offering routine vaccinations.”

— NEHALI PATEL, MD

The CDC’s vaccine schedule also provides guidance for states and institutions like schools, explains [Nehali Patel, MD](#), an associate faculty member at the Infectious Disease Clinic at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital. “Childhood vaccination schedules are the guidepost for all providers to refer to when offering routine vaccinations,” Dr. Patel describes. “They are also the main resource for parents and schools to see what is recommended for each age group and special circumstance.” [3]

Additionally, Dr. Patel says these recommendations offer key guidelines regarding the number of vaccines in a series to offer, what ages children should start receiving these vaccines, how to space the vaccines out, and how to vaccinate children who have [chronic conditions](#) or are immunocompromised. [3]

Related: [Experts Weigh In On If Schools Will Require the COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

How the COVID Vaccine Fits Into Immunization Schedules

2023.^[4]

“I’ll be waiting like all other parents and even pediatricians to see what the official recommendation is,” Dr. Diamond says. But if she were to make a prediction, she expects the CDC will recommend infants and children receive the primary series for the COVID vaccines and it’s likely a yearly booster will be recommended as well.

Dr. Patel has a similar prediction: she also expects that a primary series of the COVID vaccine will be recommended, along with a yearly booster. As for how the primary series will work, Dr. Patel expects the recommendations will be similar to what it is now for children.

“The [Pfizer vaccine](#) will require three doses for 1st time recipients who are under 5 years old,” Dr. Patel describes. “The [Moderna](#) will require 2 doses.” After that, she expects there will be seasonal [COVID boosters](#), similar to the [flu shot](#), updated yearly to target circulating COVID variants.^[5]

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COVID Vaccinations Lag for Children

To date, [COVID vaccination](#) has lagged in children, especially young children. According to the Academy of American Pediatrics (AAP), as of October 26, 2022, 58% of 12–17 year olds have received two doses of a COVID vaccine, and 31% of 5–11 year-olds have received two doses. The vaccine uptake for 6 months to 4 years old is even lower—only 9% of kids in this age group have received even one COVID vaccine.^[6]

Katelyn Jetelina, PhD, an epidemiologist and founder of [Your Local Epidemiologist](#), shares some thoughts on why this may be happening. “First, I think this has to do with the lagged clinical trials and honestly waiting too long,” she said. “So, many children were already infected by the time vaccinations were available that many parents don’t see the benefit.”^[7]

parents, she says. “However, comparing children to adults is inherently flawed, as kids aren’t supposed to be hospitalized (or die),” Dr. Jetelina emphasizes. This type of messaging hasn’t reached parents with enough clarity, she says. ^[8]

Finally, Dr. Jetelina thinks there are still quite a few hesitant parents and even hesitant pediatricians. There’s hope, though, she says. “Vaccine confidence takes time, and I think over time this gap will eventually close,” Dr. Jetelina describes. “Parents just want to do the best thing for their kids and it takes time to be convincing.”

Related: [Should I Get My Child Pfizer's Omicron Booster Shot?](#)

Some Vaccines Required For Schools

Every state is different but all states in the U.S. require at least some of the CDC-recommended vaccines for school entry—and they have done so long before COVID vaccines came on the scene. According to the Pew Research Center, all states require vaccines against diphtheria, tetanus, [pertussis](#), polio, chickenpox, measles, and rubella. Every state besides Iowa also requires the mumps vaccine. Some daycares and preschools require [flu shots](#). Mandates for vaccines like hepatitis A and B also vary from state to state. ^[9]

Not only do the CDC recommendations help schools decide what vaccines to require, but their recommendations have an important role to play when it comes to vaccine access for kids, Dr. Jetelina points out. CDC vaccine recommendations are added to the Vaccines for Children program, she says. When this happens, the federal government is required to pay for vaccines for children who don’t have health insurance. ^[10]

“This is incredibly important for health equity in the United States,” Dr. Jetelina commented.

Related: [The Evolution of Vaccines](#)

The CDC's recent update adding COVID vaccines to the child immunization schedule has caused a lot of confusion and questions among parents. Remember, nothing is happening right now. The detailed guidelines are expected in early 2023. But each individual state will decide what to do with this information in terms of mandating vaccines. ^[2] Everyone has unique concerns when it comes to COVID vaccines for children. If you have any further questions about vaccinating your child against COVID, please touch base with their pediatrician or healthcare provider.

Read Next: [Mandatory vs. Recommended Vaccines: What You Should Know](#)

10 Sources 



By [Wendy Wisner](#)

Wendy Wisner is a lactation consultant and writer covering maternal/child health, parenting, general health and wellness, and mental health. She has worked with breastfeeding parents for over a decade, and is a mom to two boys.

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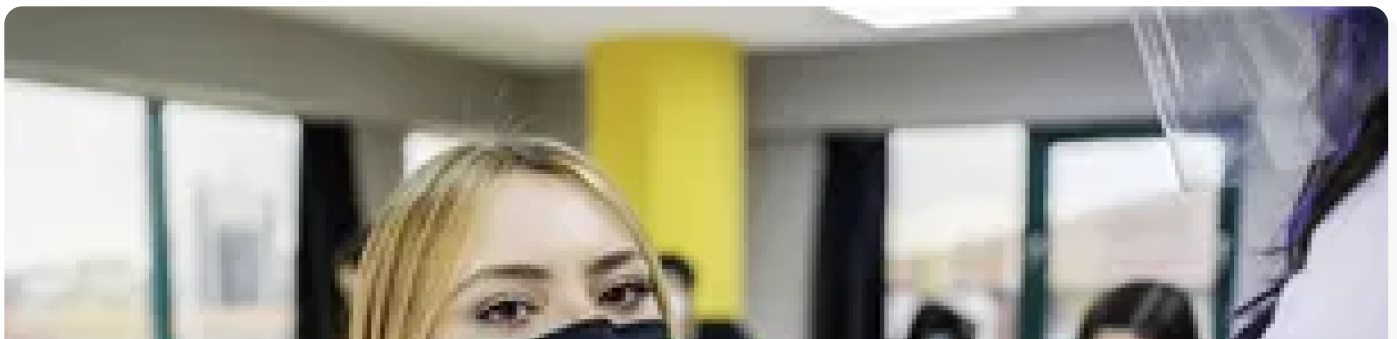
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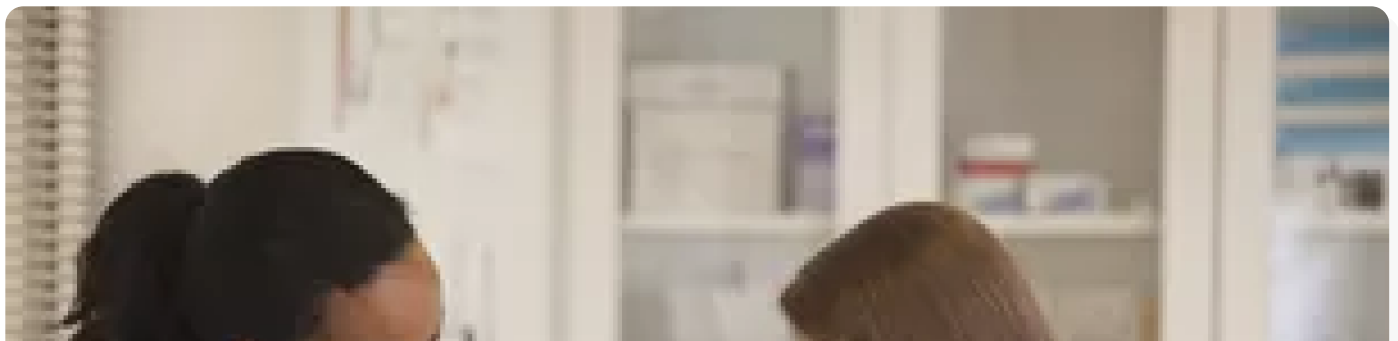
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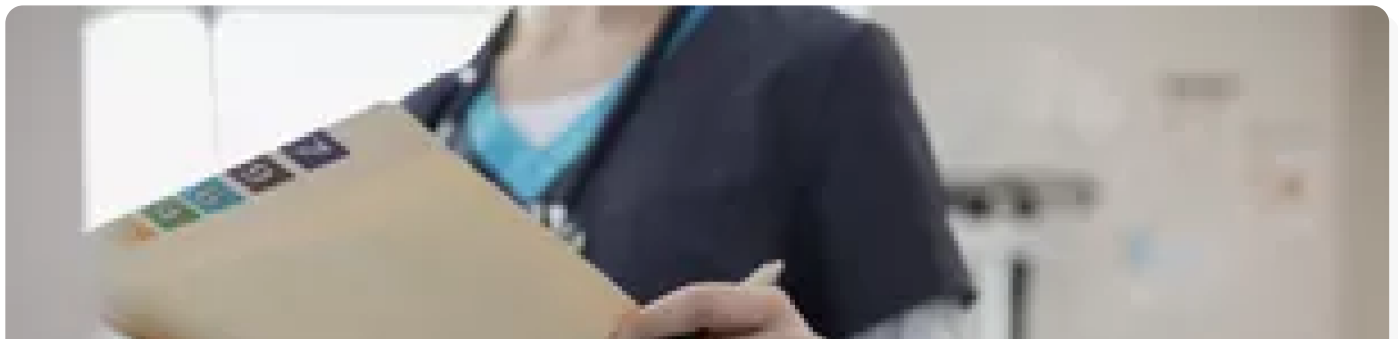
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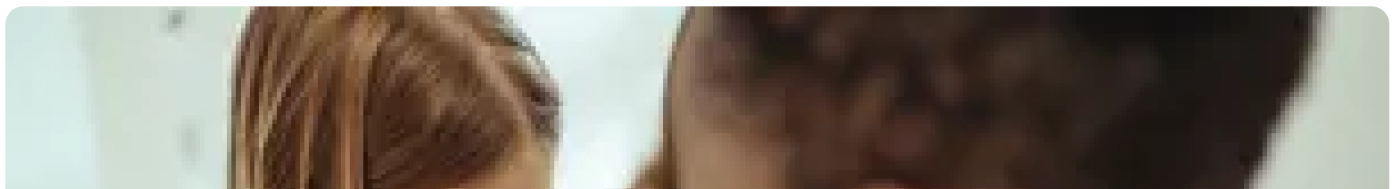
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