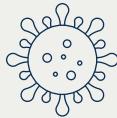


## UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

# Getting COVID-19 vs. Getting Vaccinated



We all want to make the best health choices for our children. So how risky is COVID-19 compared to the vaccines that prevent severe COVID-19?

## COVID-19 FAST FACTS



### HOW CONTAGIOUS?

**Extremely contagious.** Only 3 years after the first COVID-19 case, there were more than 102 million cases in the United States.<sup>1</sup>



### HOW SERIOUS?

**Extremely serious.** Most children with COVID-19 are at lower risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 than adults. However, children can get very sick from COVID-19, which is why we vaccinate.<sup>2</sup> In the first 3 years, COVID-19 caused more than 1 million deaths in the United States.<sup>3</sup> As of February 2023, COVID-19 was the 8th leading cause of death in children.<sup>4</sup> Serious complications can include:

**Death:** Children are at higher risk of hospitalization and death if not treated.<sup>4,5</sup>

**Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C):** Occurs 2–6 weeks after infection regardless of the severity; it can occur even after mild cases of COVID-19 or in children with no symptoms.<sup>6</sup>

**Long COVID:** Children are at lower risk than adults, but some children experience longer-term symptoms.<sup>7</sup>

## VACCINE FAST FACTS



### HOW EFFECTIVE?

How well a COVID-19 vaccine works for a child can vary depending on how long it has been since their last dose, the variant they are exposed to, and whether they've previously had COVID-19. The vaccines are effective in preventing hospitalization and death. So even if a vaccinated child gets sick, they are unlikely to have serious illness.<sup>8,9</sup>



### SAFETY RECORDS

Scientists have been studying mRNA technology, which many COVID-19 vaccines use, for more than 30 years. The first COVID-19 vaccines were used in the United States in December 2020.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 2023, more than 711 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines had been given in the U.S.<sup>13</sup> Serious side effects are very rare.<sup>14</sup>



### HOW SAFE?

Serious side effects are rare. Heart inflammation is a rare side effect that most frequently affected adolescent and young adult males after the second dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, but cases have been seen in females and after other doses. In most cases, it is a temporary condition that resolves with treatment and rest.<sup>10,11</sup>



### MYTH BUSTER

Did COVID-19 vaccine research take any safety shortcuts? No. More than 100 years of vaccine research tells us that severe, long-term side effects of vaccines are rare.<sup>14,15</sup>



**COVID-19 vaccine monitoring is the most intense safety monitoring program in U.S. history. Five separate safety systems continuously monitor all vaccines for as long as the vaccines are given.<sup>16</sup> Learn more at [hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/index.html](https://hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/index.html).**

## COMPARING THE TWO

### COVID-19

COVID-19 symptoms vary and may change with new variants. Common symptoms of COVID-19 can include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Vomiting
- Nausea, belly pain, or diarrhea
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches or pains
- Headache

### VACCINES TO PREVENT SEVERE COVID-19

#### Common Mild to Moderate Symptoms and Common Side Effects<sup>14,17,18,19</sup>

Common side effects of vaccines to prevent severe COVID-19 are usually mild and last 1–3 days. If side effects occur, they can include:

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the vaccine was given
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Fever or chills
- Nausea or diarrhea

Children 4 and younger may also cry, feel sleepy, or lose their appetite.

## Rare, More Serious Symptoms or Complications and Rare Side Effects

6,7,10, 14,18,20,21,22,23,24,25

Serious symptoms or complications of COVID-19 vary and can include:

- Myocarditis\*
- Multisystem inflammatory syndrome\*\*
- Neurologic issues, such as seizures
- Long COVID

Serious side effects of vaccines to prevent severe COVID-19 vary and can include:

- Myocarditis (71 cases out of 1 million doses among boys ages 12–15)
- Severe allergic reaction (generally, for every 1 million COVID-19 vaccines administered in the United States, only about 5 cases result in a severe allergic reaction)

\*Studies during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that the risk of myocarditis after having COVID-19 is greater than after COVID-19 vaccination.

\*\*Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) is a rare but severe condition caused by SARS-CoV-2 infection that can affect a child's heart, lungs, and other organs. Cases of MIS-C in 2023 predominantly occurred among unvaccinated children and children whose immunity from prior vaccination had declined over time. COVID-19 vaccination is an important tool in preventing MIS-C.

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