

KIDS: TO JAB OR NOT TO JAB, THAT IS THE QUESTION

The FDA, CDC and AAP have recently recommended that adolescents 12 and older get vaccinated against Covid-19. At this time only the Pfizer BioNTech is approved for this age group. It is likely that both the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines will be available for adolescents in the next few months. Clinical trials are presently being done on younger children. Those as young as 2 years of age might be eligible for the Covid-19 vaccine in the fall, and those as young as 6 months by early 2022. It has also been determined that coronavirus vaccine can be given along with other routine childhood vaccines. There does not need to be a 14 day waiting period.

WHY VACCINATE CHILDREN?

This new authorization expands the pool of eligible vaccine recipients to about 85% of the total US population, covering an additional 17 million children, and comes at a time when people less than 18 account for 20-25% of newly reported Covid-19 infections. Vaccinating adolescents will get us close to the number we need for community immunity.

Kids who do get Covid-19 are most often asymptomatic or only mildly ill. However, children, especially adolescents, easily and silently transmit coronavirus to others, allowing the virus to continue to spread. On the other hand, they CAN get sick. There have been more than 22 million cases of Covid-19 in children. Tens of thousands have been hospitalized and more than 300 have died, more than during any flu season. MIS-C, a dangerous severe inflammatory syndrome has occurred in more than 3000 children. As in adults, children can develop “long haul” symptoms. Student athletes who have been ill with Covid-19 are at risk for heart problems, and must be evaluated by their pediatrician and in some cases also a cardiologist.

Children and adolescents have suffered in many non-medical ways. Education, sports, socializing with friends and family, and other activities, have all been affected. Life has not been normal. Covid-19 has taken a toll on the mental and emotional health of our youth.

The coronavirus vaccines have been extremely successful, beyond our wildest dreams. Covid-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths have been decreasing at a steady rate. However, every person with Covid-19 provides the virus with an opportunity to spread and continue to mutate. Mutated viruses can become resistant to the present vaccines. It is very important to continue to vaccinate as many adults and children as we can to prevent illness and mutations.

IS THE VACCINE EFFECTIVE AND SAFE FOR CHILDREN?

In the more than two thousand 12-15 year olds in the clinical trials, the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine was 100% effective. None of the vaccinated children had symptomatic infection with Covid-19. Sixteen patients in the placebo group got infected. In addition, the antibody levels in the vaccinated group were very high, higher than in vaccinated adults, evidence of a robust immune response to the vaccine. There have been millions of doses of coronavirus vaccine given to adults around the world, and the safety record is excellent. There is no biologic mechanism that would make the vaccine worse for children. Despite concerns by some, there is no evidence that the vaccine affects development or fertility. No vaccines cause autism. The coronavirus vaccines are not live virus vaccines. They do not interact with or change our DNA.

Although it seems that the coronavirus vaccines were “rushed” and developed too quickly, they are extremely safe and effective. The mRNA technology used in the Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna vaccines has been studied for decades. Their seemingly fast development is somewhat due to the ability to avoid the usual government “red tape” that normally slows down vaccine development. The Pfizer BioNTech and other vaccines have been approved for Emergency Use Authorization. Based on all available scientific information and evidence, and the fact that there are no adequate, approved, or available alternatives, it was concluded that the known and potential benefits of the vaccines outweigh any known and potential risks.

All vaccines in the United States are constantly monitored by the FDA and CDC for safety. Although there have never been frequent serious problems attributed to any vaccine, some have been removed from the market because of suspected or infrequent issues with safety or efficacy. The temporary pause in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was a result of careful monitoring. One vaccine expert has said that the Sars-CoV-2 vaccines will undergo “the most intensive safety monitoring in US history”.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

The side effect profile in adolescents is very similar to those in adults. The most common side effects are pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache, chills, and muscle aches. Fever, joint pain, and nausea are less frequent. Most side effects occur within the first 48 hours after injection, and are gone within 24-48 hours. If adolescents react like adults, as we expect they will, there will not be any issues in the first several months after the vaccine. From experience with many other vaccines, side effects almost never occur after the first 6 weeks after a vaccine is given.

WILL VACCINATION BE REQUIRED?

It is very unlikely that there will be a federal mandate to get vaccinated for Covid-19. Whether kids must be vaccinated for school, sports, camps and other communal activities will probably be decided on the state and local level. Some colleges are already requiring vaccine for Covid-19 before the fall semester.

WHERE SHOULD MY CHILD GET VACCINATED?

Beacon Pediatrics is providing Covid vaccine for all community members. Appointments can be scheduled by calling the office 302-645-8212 or online at www.beaconpediatrics.net. Keep the original paper vaccine card, and don't laminate it, just in case there will be booster shots or other information that has to be added. You can laminate a copy and keep one copy on your cellphone. Maximum immunity from the virus does not occur until two weeks after the second dose of vaccine. Two weeks after your second dose is when you are considered “fully vaccinated”.

SUMMARY

As pediatricians we are thrilled to get the vaccine for our children, grandchildren, and patients. In fact, all of the eligible children and grandchildren of the Beacon Pediatrics providers have already been vaccinated, and they were even excited to do so. They wanted their lives back. They wanted a return to normalcy. The Covid-19 vaccine will benefit not only the safety and health of children who get it, but also the safety and health of others. Every person that we can vaccinate is one less person in which the Sars-CoV-2 can spread and mutate.

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