

Dear families,

I know the last two school years have been challenging for students, parents, and guardians. Despite at-home learning, outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools and the uncertainty that comes with the virus, our health and education systems have worked hard to support the social and emotional well-being and academic needs of children and youth. Parents and guardians, you have also done an amazing job during this very challenging time.

The COVID-19 virus is still in our communities and we must not become complacent. It is important that everyone, together, take the steps needed to protect themselves, others and to reduce the spread of the virus and minimize the need for restrictive measures. Vaccination is one of these ways.

Health Canada recently authorized Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty (Pfizer) COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), which advises provinces and territories on the best way to use new vaccines, recommends the use of this vaccine for this age group and provided their [recommendations](#) in mid-November.

Children and youth who are ages 5 and older can now get the COVID-19 vaccine in Nova Scotia. Which vaccine and how much of a dose you receive depends on your age.

If you have a child who is between the ages of 5 to 11, they will need two doses of the pediatric (kids) vaccine at least 8 weeks (56 days) apart. This is a very similar vaccine to the Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty adolescent/adult vaccine but has one-third of the dose. They must also wait 14 days between receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and any other vaccine.

For children who are 11 and turning 12, they will receive their two doses 8 weeks apart. They will receive the pediatric dose when they are 11 and then the adolescent/adult dose when they turn 12.

If you have a child who is 12 and older and who hasn't yet had their first or second dose of the vaccine, I strongly encourage you to make an appointment for them as soon as possible. For people 12 and older, the time between doses is a minimum 28 days. However, it is recommended that they also wait 8 weeks (56 days) between doses.

It takes 2 weeks (14 days) after everyone's second dose to be considered fully vaccinated. The sooner everyone books their appointments, the sooner everyone gets fully vaccinated, which also means they are protecting siblings and family members ages 4 and under, or others who cannot yet be vaccinated.

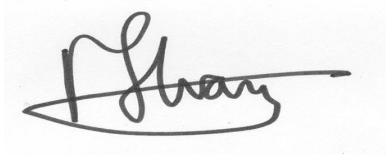
As the holidays are quickly approaching and schools will close for several weeks, this is the perfect opportunity to schedule an appointment for your child. We have enough vaccine and capacity across the province to give all children ages 5 to 11 their first dose before the end of the year, while continuing to support youth 12 and older to receive their first or second dose.

It is quick and easy to book an appointment. You can book an appointment online at [www.novascotia.ca/vaccination](http://www.novascotia.ca/vaccination). This is the preferred way to book an appointment. Alternatively, if you are unable to book online or need translation support to book the appointment you call toll-free: 1-833-797-7772 between 6am and 10pm, 7 days a week.

I understand that vaccination can make some children anxious or fearful. I also understand how difficult it can be for some parents to make this decision. For resources to help you talk about vaccination with your child and for more information on the COVID vaccine for kids please visit <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/vaccinate-ns/>

Together we can get through this. I hope the rest of your school year is safe and enjoyable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Strang', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Robert Strang MD, MHSc., FRCPC  
Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Department of Health and Wellness



# COVID-19 Vaccines – What You Need to Know

- The vaccine can protect people from getting COVID-19. If people do get infected, it also protects them from getting very sick from COVID-19.
- Pfizer is an mRNA vaccine. You cannot get COVID-19 from this vaccine.
- Children and youth ages 5 and older will need two doses of the Pfizer's pediatric vaccine to be fully vaccinated. You are fully vaccinated 14 days after your second dose.
- If your child is between 5 and 11 years of age and receives both doses before they turn 12, they will get two doses of the pediatric vaccine. Their first and second dose will be at least 8 weeks apart.
- If your child gets their first dose at age 11, they will get the pediatric vaccine for dose one. If they turn 12 by the time of their second dose, they will receive the adolescent/adult vaccine for dose two. The two doses will be at least 8 weeks apart.
- If your child is 12 or older, they will receive two adolescent/adult doses at least 28 days apart. However, it's recommended you wait 8 weeks between doses.
- The COVID-19 virus changes. These are called variants. Some variants, like the Delta variant, are more contagious and can make younger adults, children, and youth sicker. COVID-19 vaccines provide protection against variants.
- More information to support your child to get vaccinated is available at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/vaccinate-ns/>



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# Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine

- The COVID-19 vaccine is free. Everyone who is 5 and older in Nova Scotia can get the vaccine if they want it.
- Your child will need two doses to be considered fully vaccinated. You are fully vaccinated 14 days after your second dose.
- You are strongly encouraged to book an appointment for your child online at [novascotia.ca/vaccination](https://novascotia.ca/vaccination)
  - You will need a Nova Scotia health card and email address or phone number to book online
- If you can't book online, you can book an appointment for your child by phone. Call **1-833-797-7772** (toll-free)
  - You don't need a health card to book by phone
  - You can ask for an interpreter when you call this number
- Children and youth, like adults, may experience mild side effects like sore muscles, feeling tired, mild fever or a sore arm where the vaccine was injected. This is normal. It means the vaccine is working and teaching their body how to fight the virus.



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# Helping Your Child Get Ready for Their COVID-19 Vaccine

Children are often worried about getting vaccinated or getting needles of any kind. Here are some tips to help you prepare your child to get the vaccine.

## Make sure they know what will happen and make a plan.

- Tell them when they will get the vaccine.
- Ask your child if they want you or someone else to go with them. Some older children may want to go alone.
- Make sure your child has something to eat and drink before going to the vaccine clinic. This can help to prevent feeling faint while being vaccinated.
- Your child can wear whatever is most comfortable to them, but it is helpful if they wear short sleeves or a top with sleeves that are easy to roll up.

## Talk with your child and listen to their questions.

- Listen to their questions and concerns.
- Share reliable information regarding the vaccine with them. Immunize Canada's website, [immunize.ca/covid-19-info](https://immunize.ca/covid-19-info), is a good source of information.
- It's important to answer your child's questions truthfully and include them in making decisions about their health and in conversations with their health care provider.
- If your child is worried or afraid, immunizers at the vaccine clinics can help them. There are also practical tips to make vaccination more comfortable. The IWK Health Centre has information for families on talking to children about needles. Check out their [Nervous about needles? tip sheet](#) or download their [COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit](#).



## Help them work out ways to take their mind off the vaccination.

Distraction—thinking about something else—is a good way to cope with something that might hurt. Help your child to come up with a list of things they can do to distract themselves while waiting for the needle, while getting their shot, and afterwards. For example, they could:

- jiggle their arm before the shot so it is soft like cooked spaghetti
- think of a favourite memory
- listen to music
- chat with a friend, listen to music or watch a video on a cell phone
- read a book
- play with a fidget toy (stress ball)

## Never say, “It won’t hurt.”

Be honest. Tell them what they can really expect. You can tell them something like, “You might feel a small pinch and some pressure.”

As with other vaccines, there may be side effects after they get the vaccine. It is normal and expected to have common reactions after you receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Most of these are mild and last for only a day or two, and not everyone gets them.

### **Common side effects include:**

- Soreness, tenderness or redness at the spot where the vaccine was given
- Feeling tired
- Headache
- Fever
- General muscle aches or mild flu-like symptoms

## Help them stay calm.

- Be calm and matter of fact yourself.
- Don’t joke or tease. For example, don’t joke that they will get the “extra big” needle.
- Don’t apologize that they “have to go through this.”
- If you go with them, be aware of your own feelings regarding needles. Try to maintain a calm presence to reassure your child.

**Information adapted from “Clinical Practice Guideline for Pain Management during Childhood Immunizations” developed by Help Eliminate Pain in Kids.**



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