



# Covid-19 Vaccine

Important Information about the Comirnaty  
Pfizer BioNTech vaccine for children aged 6  
months to 4 years

Version 2

May 2023

This is a large print leaflet. The leaflet will be updated as new information becomes available. For a printed copy of the most recent version, contact NCBI by emailing **library@ncbi.ie**

## **About this leaflet**

This leaflet tells you about the COVID-19 – coronavirus – vaccine for children aged 6 months to 4 years.

It tells you about:

- COVID-19 in children aged 6 months to 4 years
- what the COVID-19 vaccine is
- the benefits of vaccination for children aged 6 months to 4 years
- the risks of vaccination for children aged 6 months to 4 years
- vaccine safety and side effects
- what to expect after their COVID-19 vaccine
- giving consent for their COVID-19 vaccine
- where you can get more information

**Please read this leaflet carefully. You can also talk to a healthcare professional, like your GP – Doctor – or Pharmacist, about the vaccine.**

## **You can also:**

- read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet available on [www.hse.ie/covid19vaccinePIL](http://www.hse.ie/covid19vaccinePIL)
- read the HSE comic strip, 'Getting my COVID-19 vaccine' – this may be suitable to read with your child
- read further information available on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

## **About COVID-19**

**COVID-19 is an illness that can affect the lungs and airways, and sometimes other parts of the body. It's caused by a virus called coronavirus.**

COVID-19 is highly infectious. It spreads through the air through droplets produced when people cough or sneeze, or when they touch surfaces where the droplets have landed and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

### **The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:**

- a fever – high temperature of thirty-eight degrees Celsius or above – including having chills
- dry cough
- fatigue

It can take up to 14 days following exposure to COVID-19 for symptoms to show. The symptoms can be similar to those of a cold or flu. Your child may not have all of these symptoms or they may just feel generally less well than usual.

If your child has any symptoms of COVID-19, you should keep them at home until 48 hours after they feel better. You can check **[hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie)** to see if they need a COVID-19 test.

For more information on COVID-19, please visit **[www.hse.ie/coronavirus](https://www.hse.ie/coronavirus)** or call HSELive on **1800 700 700**.

## **COVID-19 and children aged 6 months to 4 years**

The vast majority of children in this age group who get COVID-19 have very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.

COVID-19 can cause serious illness, hospitalisation or death in children, but this is very rare. Although the risk of hospitalisation and serious disease is very low in this age group, it is higher than in older children.

Sometimes, symptoms connected to COVID-19 can continue for some weeks or months. This is called 'long COVID'. The risk of this condition is lower in children compared to adults.

The risk of a child being hospitalised because of COVID-19 is very low, and the risk of any child needing intensive care treatment is extremely low.

Children with certain health conditions are at higher risk of severe illness and hospitalisation if they get COVID-19. However, in Ireland, over half of children in hospital with COVID-19 may not have any underlying health conditions.

Rarely, COVID-19 can cause a condition called Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in children – MIS-C.

The condition causes pneumonia, inflammation of the heart and difficulty breathing. Most children with MIS-C recover after time in hospital or intensive care but some children have lasting side effects and a very small number can die.

## **What is the COVID-19 vaccine?**

A vaccine is a substance that should improve immunity – protection – to a particular disease. Vaccines teach the immune system how to protect people from diseases.

The evidence available says that the COVID-19 vaccine should offer your child protection from COVID-19. If children are

vaccinated, this should also help reduce the numbers who become seriously ill or die from COVID-19 in our community.

## **What vaccine is my child being offered?**

The vaccine your child is being offered is called Comirnaty – Pfizer/BioNTech.

This is an mRNA vaccine that teaches your child's body how to make a protein that will trigger an immune response, without using the live virus that causes COVID-19.

Your child's body then makes antibodies that help fight the infection if the COVID-19 virus enters their body in the future. Before vaccination, you will be asked to give consent for your child to get the vaccine and this consent will be recorded.

## **Why is the vaccine being offered to all children aged 6 months to 4 years?**

Our aim in offering the vaccine to this population is to protect people and reduce the illness and deaths caused by this virus.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine should protect your child and those around them from getting COVID-19. Though serious illness from COVID-19 is rare in this age group, they are even

less likely to become seriously ill with COVID-19 if they are vaccinated.

COVID-19 vaccines are recommended by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee – NIAC – for children aged 6 months to 4 years who have a health condition that puts them at high risk of severe illness if they get COVID-19.

For all children in this age group, the recommendation of NIAC is that the benefits of vaccination are greater than the risks from the vaccine, meaning this age group can be offered the vaccine.

The benefits include avoiding getting COVID-19, and extra protection from the rare risks of serious illness from COVID-19. Vaccinating children could also reduce transmission to others in the household, for example, those with a weak immune system. Children who are vaccinated will be less likely to miss school and other activities because of COVID-19.

## **Is the vaccine effective for children aged 6 months to 4 years?**

The clinical trial for the Comirnaty – Pfizer/BioNTech – vaccine showed that it was highly effective at preventing COVID-19 in

children this age after three doses. It is also highly effective at preventing serious illness that could cause hospitalisation with COVID-19.

## **Is the vaccine safe for children aged 6 months to 4 years?**

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee recommends that children aged 6 months to 4 years old be offered this COVID-19 vaccine.

This vaccine has been tested on thousands of people including over 3,000 children aged 6 months to 4 years as part of clinical trials. No additional safety concerns were identified in the clinical trial for children in this age group.

This vaccine has also met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness, and been approved and licensed by regulators.

For Ireland, the regulator is the European Medicines Agency EMA – visit [www.ema.europa.eu](http://www.ema.europa.eu) for more information.

In order to be approved for use, the vaccine went through all the clinical trials and safety checks all other licensed medicines go through, following international standards of safety. Safety



monitoring of all COVID-19 vaccines is constantly reviewed by the relevant authorities.

While the work to develop COVID-19 vaccines has moved much faster than usual, the vaccine we are offering your child has gone through all the usual steps needed to develop and approve a safe and effective vaccine.

We are still learning about the effectiveness and side effects of COVID-19 vaccines in this age group.

All medicines have side effects and you should read about known common, rare and very rare side effects of this vaccine in this leaflet before you give consent for your child to be vaccinated.

## **My child has already had COVID-19, can they get the vaccine?**

If your child has had COVID-19 they will likely have some immunity.

Even if your child has already had COVID-19, they could still get it again. The vaccine will reduce the risk of getting COVID-19 infection again.

## **Can my child get the COVID-19 vaccine if they have a high temperature?**

No. If they have a fever – temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above, you should delay getting the vaccine until they feel better.

## **Can the vaccine give my child COVID-19?**

No. The COVID-19 vaccine cannot give your child COVID-19. It is possible to catch COVID-19 before getting the vaccine and not realise they have the symptoms until after the vaccination appointment.

If your child has any symptoms of COVID-19 – or if they have a fever which starts more than 2 days after their vaccine, or lasts longer than 2 days – they should self-isolate – stay at home – until 48 hours after they feel better. You can check **[hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie)** to see if they need a COVID-19 test.

## **Who is my child's vaccinator?**

This is the person who gives them their vaccine. They are trained by the HSE to give COVID-19 vaccines.

## **How is the COVID-19 vaccine given?**

The COVID-19 vaccine is given as an injection into the thigh or upper arm depending on your child's age. It will only take a few minutes.

## **How many doses of COVID-19 vaccine will my child need?**

They will need three doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for the best possible protection against COVID-19. Your child will get their second dose three weeks after the first dose, followed by a third dose eight weeks after the second dose.

## **My child has COVID-19 now, can they get the vaccine?**

If your child has COVID-19 and their first vaccine dose is due:

- they can be vaccinated from 4 weeks after they first develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.

However, for their vaccine to be most effective, it is recommended to wait 6 months so the vaccine is most effective.

If your child has COVID-19 and their second vaccine dose is due:

- they can be vaccinated from 4 weeks after they first develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19

If your child has COVID-19 and their third vaccine dose is due, if they:

- had a COVID-19 infection more than 7 days after the second dose, a third dose is not required
- had a COVID-19 infection within 7 days of their second dose, they should get a third dose eight weeks after they first develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19

## **What are the side effects of the vaccine?**

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild to moderate, short-term, and not everyone gets them.

More than 1 in 10 children may have these very common side effects:

- irritability
- drowsiness
- decreased appetite
- feeling tired
- tenderness or swelling in your arm where you had the vaccine injection
- redness where the vaccine was given
- headache
- muscle pain
- joint pain
- diarrhoea
- fever – temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above – or chills

Up to 1 in 10 children may have these common side effects:

- a rash – 6 to 23 months

- nausea
- vomiting

Up to 1 in 100 children may have these uncommon side effects:

- itchiness where the vaccine was given
- generalised itchiness
- swelling of the lymph glands
- sleeplessness
- excessive sweating
- night sweats
- lack of energy, lethargy or feeling unwell
- pain in the vaccinated arm

Up to 1 in 1,000 children may have these rare side effects:

- temporary drooping on one side of the face
- allergic reactions like hives or swelling of the face

Up to 1 in 10,000 children may have these very rare side effects:

- myocarditis and pericarditis.

Early data from other countries shows myocarditis is less likely in those aged 12 to 15 than those aged 16 to 24. Myocarditis in children aged 6 months to 4 years is very rare. In the USA, over a million doses of the mRNA vaccines have been given to children in this age group. There have been no reports of myocarditis in these children.

We are still learning about the effectiveness and side effects of COVID-19 vaccines in this age group.

Myocarditis and pericarditis are inflammatory heart conditions. The risk of these very rare conditions is higher in younger men.

These conditions are more likely to occur after the second dose and mostly happen within 14 days of getting the vaccine.

Two European studies have estimated the risk of myocarditis, after the second dose of the vaccine:

- One additional case for every 38,000 men aged 12 to 29 – within 7 days
- One additional case for every 17,500 men aged 16 to 24 – within 28 days.

Most people get better on their own or with supportive treatment, but would need care in hospital. We don't yet know if there are any long-term problems because of these side effects.

It's not known yet how many people who get this vaccine will experience these side effects but they are thought to be extremely rare:

- a severe allergic reaction. Your vaccinator is trained to treat severe allergic reactions
- Erythema Multiforme, a skin reaction that causes red spots or patches on the skin that may look like a target or "bulls-eye" with a dark red centre surrounded by paler red rings
- extensive swelling of the arm – or leg – where the vaccine was given
- tingling or prickling sensation, or loss of sensation in some part of the body

The COVID-19 vaccine has gone through the same clinical trials and safety checks as all other licensed vaccines, however the vaccine is new and long-term side effect information is limited.



As more people in Ireland and around the world get this vaccine, more information on side effects may become available. The HSE will update this information regularly on our website, and if necessary, will update the information leaflets given to people at their appointment for their first or second dose of the vaccine.

## **Symptoms of myocarditis and pericarditis**

Very rarely, people may develop myocarditis and pericarditis after getting the Comirnaty – Pfizer/BioNTech – vaccine.

Myocarditis and pericarditis are inflammatory heart conditions. You should know the signs to look out for in your child.

Get medical help if your child gets any of these symptoms after their vaccine:

- breathlessness
- palpitations – a forceful heartbeat that may be irregular
- chest pain

Signs of myocarditis in younger children may be more non-specific including:

- irritability
- vomiting
- difficulty feeding
- rapid and shallow breathing
- fatigue

## **Are there some children who should not get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Yes. Your child should not get the Comirnaty – Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine if:

- your child has had a severe allergic reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine – including polyethylene glycol or PEG. Read the manufacturer’s Patient Information Leaflet on [www.hse.ie/covid19vaccinePIL](http://www.hse.ie/covid19vaccinePIL) to see the list of ingredients.
- your child has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.
- your child has had a severe allergic reaction to Trometamol – an ingredient in contrast dye used in MRI radiological studies.

You should talk to your child's doctor before getting the COVID-19 vaccine if they:

- had a severe allergic reaction – anaphylaxis – in the past, including to any other vaccine or medication
- had myocarditis or pericarditis after a previous dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

If your child has previously had Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome, they can get the COVID-19 vaccine once they have recovered and at least 90 days after they were diagnosed – whichever is longer.

As a precaution, if your child has recently received the monkeypox vaccine – Imvanex or Jynneos – they need to wait 4 weeks before they get their COVID-19 vaccine because of the unknown risk of myocarditis.

Other vaccines should be separated from COVID-19 vaccines in this age group by 14 days. Routine vaccines should be prioritised in children of this age group.

Most children will be able to safely get the vaccine. The person giving your child the vaccine will be happy to answer any questions you have at your appointment for the vaccine.

They will also give you an aftercare advice leaflet, and a vaccine record card showing the name and batch number of the vaccine your child has been given.

## **After getting the vaccine**

We are giving you a record of your child's vaccination today. Please keep the record card safe.

## **What might happen in the next few days?**

Some people who got the vaccine that your child got today may get some of the side effects listed above. Most of these are mild to moderate and short lived.

## **Fever after the vaccine**

It is quite common to develop a fever after vaccination. Usually, this happens within 2 days of getting the vaccine, and it goes away within 2 days. Your child is more likely to get a fever after their second dose of the vaccine.

If your child feels uncomfortable, you should give them paracetamol or ibuprofen as directed on the box or leaflet. If you are concerned about your child, please seek medical advice.

## **How long does it take the vaccine to work?**

After having three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, most people will have immunity. This means they will be protected against COVID-19.

It takes 7 days after getting the third dose for it to work.

There is a chance your child might still get COVID-19, even if they have the vaccine.

## **Does the vaccine work in everyone?**

The vaccines have been used in millions of people worldwide over the last year. There is strong, reliable evidence that COVID-19 vaccines greatly reduce the risk of getting COVID-19. They are highly effective at preventing deaths and serious illness with COVID-19.

The vaccines do not work the same in each person, and it is possible to still get COVID-19 after being vaccinated. If your child has a weakened immune system, there is no extra risk in taking the vaccine but it may not work as well for your child.

## **How long does immunity last from the vaccine?**

We do not know yet how long immunity will last. Clinical trials are ongoing to find this out.

## **When my child gets the vaccine, does that mean they won't spread COVID-19 to others?**

We do not know yet if having the vaccine stops people spreading the COVID-19 virus to others. That is why it is important that we all continue to follow public health advice on how to stop the spread of the virus.

## **Can my child get the COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines?**

As a precaution, if your child has recently received the monkeypox vaccine – Imvanex or Jynneos – they need to wait 4 weeks before they get their COVID-19 vaccine because of the unknown risk of myocarditis.

Other vaccines should be separated from COVID-19 vaccines by 14 days. Early childhood vaccines should be prioritised over COVID-19 vaccines.

## **Consent for your child to be vaccinated**

A parent or legal guardian will be asked to give consent for each child to be vaccinated.

Your decision to give consent for the vaccine or not will be respected and the following summary might be useful to you in being informed about your choices.

## **Benefits of the vaccine**

- Protection from COVID-19.
- Protection for children who have health conditions that put them at high risk of severe COVID-19.

- Protection for healthy children from severe COVID-19 – although this is very rare in this age group. The risk of a child being hospitalised because of COVID-19 is very low, and the risk of any child needing intensive care treatment is extremely low.
- Protection from COVID-19, and complications from COVID-19 such as ‘long COVID’ and Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in children.
- May help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others. This is especially important if children and young people are living with a sibling or an adult who is at risk of severe COVID-19.

## **Consider your child having the vaccine if:**

- Your child has an underlying medical condition that puts them at high risk of severe COVID-19.
- Your child lives with a child or an adult who is at high risk of severe COVID-19.
- You want to increase protection for your child against the extremely rare possibility of severe COVID-19, Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome or ‘long COVID’.



## **Risks of the vaccine**

- Short term side effects like a sore arm, fever or tiredness.
- About 1 in 100,000 people might have a severe side effect, like an allergic reaction to the vaccine.
- Very rarely some people develop inflammation of the heart – myocarditis – and the outer lining of the heart – pericarditis– after vaccination. Most people recover from myocarditis and pericarditis but they may need treatment in hospital.
- We don't yet have information about longer term effects of COVID-19 vaccines in children.

## **Consider your child not having the vaccine, or waiting until more information is available, if:**

- You do not want to risk the very rare side effect of myocarditis and pericarditis from vaccination.
- You want to wait for more information to become available about the risk of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome and of COVID-19 in children.
- You want to wait for more information to be available about the longer term effects of the vaccines in children and young people.

## More information

For more information, read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet. This will be printed for you on the day your child gets their vaccine, or you can find it on **[www.hse.ie/covid19vaccinePIL](http://www.hse.ie/covid19vaccinePIL)**

You can also talk to a health professional, like your GP – Doctor, Pharmacist or healthcare team.

You can also visit the HSE website at **[www.hse.ie/covid19vaccine](http://www.hse.ie/covid19vaccine)** or call HSELive on **1800 700 700**.

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine, including materials in other formats and translation support, visit **[www.hse.ie/covid19vaccinematerials](http://www.hse.ie/covid19vaccinematerials)**

## How do I report side effects?

As with all vaccines, you can report suspected side effects to the Health Products Regulatory Authority – HPRA.

The HPRA is the regulatory authority in the Republic of Ireland for medicines, medical devices and other health products. As part of its role in the safety monitoring of medicines, the HPRA operates a system through which healthcare professionals or members of the public can report any suspected adverse reactions – side effects – associated with medicines and vaccines which have occurred in Ireland.

The HPRA strongly encourages reporting of suspected adverse reactions – side effects – associated with COVID-19 vaccines to support continuous monitoring of their safe and effective use. To report a suspected adverse reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine, please visit **[www.hpra.ie/report](http://www.hpra.ie/report)**

You can also ask your Doctor or a family member to report this for you. As much information as is known should be provided, and where possible, the vaccine batch number should be included.

The HPRA cannot provide clinical advice on individual cases. Members of the public should contact their healthcare professional – their Doctor or Pharmacist – with any medical concerns they may have.

## Your personal information

In order to administer the vaccine safely and to record all the necessary information to monitor and manage the vaccine, the HSE will be processing your child's personal information. All information processed by the HSE will be in accordance to the general laws and in particular the General Data Protection Regulation GDPR which came into force in 2018.

The processing of your child's data will be lawful and fair. It will only be processed for the specific purpose to manage the vaccinations. The principle of Data Minimisation has been applied. This means that only data that is necessary to identify your child, book their appointment, record their vaccination and monitor its effects is being recorded.

You have the following rights under the GDPR in respect of your child's personal data that are processed.

- Request information on and access to your child's personal data – commonly known as a 'data subject access request'. This enables you – the child's parent or legal guardian – to receive a copy of the personal data we hold about your child and to check that we are lawfully processing it.

- Request correction of the personal data that we hold about your child. This enables you to have any incomplete or inaccurate information we hold about your child corrected.
- Request erasure of your child’s personal data. This enables you to ask us to delete or remove your child’s personal data where there is no good reason for us continuing to process it. You also have the right to ask us to delete or remove your child’s personal information where you have exercised your right to object to processing.
- Object to processing of your personal data.

More information is available at [www.hse.ie/eng/gdpr](http://www.hse.ie/eng/gdpr)

**Published by HSE in May 2023**

For the most up-to-date information visit [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland