Kids And The COVID-19 Vaccine

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EVERGREEN PARK - This year, hospitalizations associated with COVID-19 increased tremendously among children and adolescents. After much research and ensuring both the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently recommended that children ages 5 to 11 years old be vaccinated against COVID-19 with the Pfizer-BioNTech pediatric vaccine – and the benefits far outweigh the known and potential risks.

Although children are generally at a lower risk of becoming severely ill with COVID-19 compared with adults, the CDC says children can still be infected, get very sick from the virus, have both short and long-term health complications, and spread COVID-19 to

others. The agency adds that children with underlying medical conditions are more at risk for severe illness from COVID-19 compared with children without underlying medical conditions.

"Complications of COVID-19 in kids can include [multisystem inflammatory syndrome](#) (MIS), and in order to help prevent that, it's very important for children to get the COVID-19 vaccination which can help prevent long-term complications," says Dr. Safiat Amuwo, an OSF HealthCare internal medicine pediatric physician.

With school in session, the holidays approaching, and family gatherings starting back up, health experts recommend signing your child up for the vaccine if they are eligible, and to do so sooner rather than later.

Once you have decided to sign your kids up for the COVID-19 vaccine, they may have questions. Dr. Amuwo says being open and honest is a good route to take.

"Just like anything as parents, it's important to discuss your child's questions or concerns. You can always sit them down on the couch and have a family meeting or a family dinner. Children are quite smart and quite resilient. If you as a parent are confident that the COVID-19 vaccine can be protective for your family, often times your children will feed off that energy," Dr. Amuwo advises.

Dr. Amuwo also suggests when talking to your children about this vaccine, explain that this is what will help us get back to normal.

"Even young children often times are aware. They are aware that things have changed. So just discussing that the purpose of the vaccine is to create a safer environment. And if you as a family take hold of getting the COVID-19 vaccine, then you can go back to doing the daily activities you were doing in the past," says Dr. Amuwo.

Before any child's vaccination appointment, Dr. Amuwo typically explains to her pediatric patients what to expect. It is common for children, especially those at a young age, to be curious about how things work, and vaccines are no different. So what is a simple way to explain vaccines to your child?

"Your body will absorb it, and once your body takes it in, you create something called antibodies. These antibodies don't give you the disease – they actually do the opposite. They will help your body fight if you come in contact with the infection," Dr. Amuwo explains.

As with any vaccination, the COVID-19 vaccine may cause some minor side effects, including: arm soreness, mild fever, tiredness, headaches, and muscle or joint aches. These are all normal.

"I know a lot of parents have concerns about the possible complications from COVID-19 vaccination, so it's always important to discuss your concerns and questions with your healthcare provider," says Dr. Amuwo.

The ability to vaccinate this age group has the potential to have a major positive impact – not only for the health and safety of children, but also in terms of the pandemic as a whole. OSF HealthCare is working on the process for administering the vaccine to kids ages 5 to 11 at OSF Medical Group primary care and pediatric clinics, and encourages patients and families to get vaccinated wherever they can.

The COVID-19 vaccine can also be given at the same time as the flu shot if your child has not yet received either. Learn where you or your child can get a COVID-19 vaccine at www.osfhealthcare.org/vaccine.