

Benefits of immunisation

Immunisation is an important way we keep children safe, like being sun smart or wearing a seatbelt. It protects your children from many serious diseases and stops disease spreading within your family and the community.

In the Cook Islands, children get free vaccinations against 12 diseases, including whooping cough (pertussis), measles and polio.

Benefits of immunisation against COVID-19

Immunising 5 to 11-year-old children helps protect family members whose health makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 virus can be unpredictable. While COVID-19 generally has milder effects in children, with symptoms being similar to a cold, some children become severely ill and require hospitalisation. Children can also have rare complications such as Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome (MIS-C) that may require intensive care. Children can also suffer long term effects (known as long COVID), even after mild cases of COVID-19.

Like adults, if your children are infected with the COVID-19 virus they may transmit the virus to other people.



More information

Please contact **22664** and you will be directed to the on-call doctor for more information.



Protecting your child from COVID-19

COVID-19 Immunisation Programme for 5 to 11-year-olds

COVID-19 Vaccine for children aged 5 to 11 years

Parents and caregivers have the opportunity to protect their children aged 5 to 11 against COVID-19, by being immunised with a child (paediatric) formulation of the Pfizer vaccine.

The vaccine used for children is a children's version of the Pfizer vaccine, with a lower dose and smaller volume.

Children need two doses of the vaccine to be fully protected. We recommend these are at least 8 weeks apart. The interval can be shortened to a minimum of 21 days if needed, for example if your child is starting treatment with immunosuppressants.

The Ministry of Health recommends immunising your child to keep them safe and to help protect your family and community from COVID-19.



Safety of the Pfizer vaccine

The Pfizer vaccine for 5 to 11-year-olds has been through clinical trials with children in this age group. In general, the side effects that were reported were mild, didn't last long, and were similar to side effects from other routine vaccines.

The vaccine is recommended for children with food allergies. Unlike some other vaccines, there is no food, gelatin or latex in the Pfizer vaccine.

The only reason that someone may not be able to have this vaccine due to allergy is if they have had a severe allergic response (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of the Pfizer vaccine or an ingredient in the vaccine. The child (paediatric) Pfizer vaccine has gone through the same rigorous approval process as other routine childhood vaccines. No clinical trials were skipped and no corners were cut in the testing of its safety.

Consent

A parent, caregiver or legal guardian will need to accompany your child to their appointment(s) as the responsible adult and be able to provide consent for them to be immunised.

At the appointment, both the adult and child can ask as many questions as they like.

Preparing your child for vaccination

1. Provide encouragement to help your child feel relaxed.
2. Make sure they have had something to eat and drink.
3. Check they're wearing clothes that make it easy to see and access their upper arm.

If they're a little nervous, they're welcome to take something to the appointment that will distract them, like a soft toy or phone.

If your child has had previous reactions to immunisations, let your vaccinator know, speak to your family doctor prior to the appointment, or talk with the doctor on duty at the **Emergency Department Rarotonga Hospital on 22664**.

Side effects

As with any immunisation, your child is likely to have a sore arm and get redness, pain or swelling at the injection site. Other reactions that can occur, usually within one or two days, include:

- headache
- a fever (feeling hot)
- nausea (feeling sick), vomiting, diarrhoea
- fatigue
- general discomfort (feeling unwell, aches and pains).

These are common and show that the vaccine is working. Encouraging rest and offering plenty of fluids will help.

Severe reactions to the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine are very rare and usually occur within a few minutes of the vaccination. For this reason, you and your child will be put in an observation area for monitoring by clinical staff to ensure they receive any medical treatment if this occurs.

Signs of severe allergic reaction can include:

- difficulty breathing
- swelling of the face and throat
- a fast heartbeat
- a bad rash all over the body
- dizziness and weakness.

If you notice your child experiencing any of these symptoms, let clinical staff know immediately. If you are not at a vaccination site, call **999**.

Myocarditis and pericarditis are very rare but serious side effects of the Pfizer vaccine. In the clinical trials, no cases were seen in children aged 5 to 11 years old, however it is important to be aware of the symptoms for all ages who are vaccinated. If your child has any of the following symptoms in the days or weeks after being vaccinated, get medical help right away.

Symptoms of myocarditis and pericarditis:

- discomfort, heaviness, tightness or pain in their chest
- difficulty breathing
- feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering, or pounding heart
- feeling faint, light-headed or dizzy.

Children with disabilities

Support for children living with a disability is available before or on the day of their vaccination. Any questions you may have about your child's needs including accessibility, free transport options, or any affects the vaccination may have on your child can be answered.

For parents and caregivers on Rarotonga please call **22664, ext. 501** to talk with Mrs. Haumata Hosking.

For parents and caregivers on Pa Enua please talk to staff at your hospital or health centre.



Book or walk in

COVID-19 immunisations are free for everyone. From (date TBC), parents or caregivers in Rarotonga can come to the social centre with their children, or book in an appointment by calling Mrs Haumata Hosking on **22664 ext 501**.

On Pa Enua, parents or caregivers will be advised of the vaccination date by your Nurse on your island.