

Pandemic: Boosters for children

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There are new details today concerning COVID-19 booster shots for children.

The Western States Scientific Safety Review Workgroup (WSSSRW) has recommended that a Pfizer COVID-19 booster dose be made available to children ages 5 through 11 at least five months after receiving the last dose in their primary vaccine series.

The decision comes after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended a booster dose for children ages 5-11.

Boosters are available today for children 5-11.

"This is great news for parents and children, who can be confident in the safety of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for kids and the extra protection a booster dose provides," Gov. Kate Brown said. "Let's keep working together to keep our friends and families safe. Thank you to the more than 3 million Oregonians who have received a vaccine dose already. I encourage everyone eligible to find a vaccine or booster appointment near you today."

The WSSSRW reviewed the data presented to the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) regarding the waning of immunity after receipt of the two-dose series, the safety of boosters in children 5–11 years of age and the boost in antibody levels produced by boosters.

The group concluded that the benefits of a booster in preventing COVID-19 illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths in this age group substantially outweighed the risk. The workgroup also called for additional efforts to provide vaccines to those who have not yet been vaccinated, and eliminating disparities in vaccine coverage.

“The decisions this week follow a careful review of evidence by experts at the FDA and CDC, and experts in the Western states pact with Oregon, Washington, California and Nevada,” said Paul Cieslak, medical director for communicable diseases and immunizations at Oregon Health Authority (OHA). “Research has shown vaccines to be safe in this age group. In its recommendation, the FDA had determined that the known and potential benefits of a single booster dose of the Pfizer vaccine for this age group outweighs the known and potential risks and will extend protection against COVID-19.”

OHA will now provide guidance and policy to Oregon vaccine providers on the use of a Pfizer booster to children ages 5 through 11.

“We want to remind all families that the most important step is for children is to get their primary series of vaccines, which can provide significant protection against severe illness,” Cieslak said. “Boosters will benefit vaccinated children who are still at risk for severe disease, and they may help children not to spread it to high-risk adults with whom they have close contact. OHA recommends that families consult their physician or a health care provider if they have questions. For those who do not have a health care provider, please call 211.”

OHA estimates that there are more than 337,000 Oregon children ages 5 through 11. As of Thursday, 36.5% of children in this group had completed their vaccination series.

Earlier this week, the FDA amended the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, authorizing a booster dose for children ages 5 –11 years for the Pfizer booster. In its decision, the FDA noted the Omicron wave saw more kids getting sick with the disease and being hospitalized, and that children may also experience longer-term effects, even following initially mild disease.

On Thursday, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky approved the recommendation, made the same day by ACIP by an 11-1 vote, with one abstention, to make the single Pfizer booster available to children in this age group.

In her recommendation, Walensky said vaccinations for the primary vaccination series among children this age group have lagged behind those in other age groups, leaving them vulnerable to serious illness. In its statement, CDC also strengthened its recommendation that persons 12 and older who are immunocompromised and those 50 and older should receive a second booster dose at least four months after their first.

Vaccines are available to people in Oregon through health care providers, local pharmacies and high-volume vaccination and testing sites.

