

Take it to Heart: COVID-19 Vaccine Safer than Infection

Drug company Pfizer recently announced that its COVID-19 vaccine is safe for children ages five to 11. Now U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) leaders say once Pfizer releases its study results, the agency will evaluate the data to decide if the shots are safe and effective enough for younger kids.

Some parents may be hesitant, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently [reported](#) rare occurrences of mild heart inflammation it believes can be linked to the COVID-19 vaccine. However, the CDC and heart care experts agree – the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine still outweigh any risks.

The cases of heart inflammation, called myocarditis, have mainly occurred in adolescent males after their second vaccine dose. Cases are extremely rare, impacting about .0062% of those vaccinated.

Dr. Abraham Kocheril is a cardiac electrophysiologist for OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute. He says the inflammation reported to the CDC has so far consisted of mild cases, and while more research is needed, it could be a product of the body's immune response to the vaccine.

“Viral infections, including COVID 19, are notorious for causing myocarditis and cardiac effects are one of the feared complications of developing COVID-19. When you get the vaccine, it is revving up your immune system; there is some inflammation that comes with that, so the rare myocarditis may be part of this response,” says Dr. Kocheril. “Typically the symptoms are mild and they resolve, unlike the COVID-19 situation, where children can end up in the hospital and sometimes even die with myocarditis. Vaccine related myocarditis is a much more benign sort of problem.”

Dr. Kocheril also says myocarditis and pericarditis (inflammation of the lining around the heart) are much more common if a person contracts COVID-19 than from vaccination. Some children have also been hospitalized with a more serious illness linked to the disease.

“There’s a broad inflammatory infection kids can get, and kids have actually died from this – it’s called MIS-C, and that’s kind of the worst case scenario, so if you get COVID-19, that’s a lot worse than getting myocarditis from the vaccine,” warns Dr. Kocheril.

In this age of instant information, it can be difficult to wade through the facts while making medical decisions for our families. Dr. Kocheril recommends relying on trusted health resources like the CDC to make informed decisions, as well as speaking to your child’s pediatrician about the risks and benefits of any vaccine.

“In the case of COVID-19, you want to not only look at the risks and benefits of the vaccination, but also the risks and benefits of not getting the vaccination,” he recommends. “When you weigh all of that, at least by the numbers, it’s a pretty simple decision.”

Currently, anyone 12 and older is eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and can self-schedule at osfhealthcare.org/vaccine.