

May 24, 2021

Dear Families,

All of us at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) hope you are safe and well. More than eight million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in New York City, marking a major step forward in ending this public health emergency.

I am writing to share the good news that all New Yorkers age 12 and older can now receive a COVID-19 vaccine. If you have a child who is at least 12 years old, I strongly encourage you to get them vaccinated as soon as possible. To find a site near you visit nyc.gov/vaccinefinder or call **877-VAX-4-NYC (877-829-4692)**. Many sites do not require an appointment.

Please consider vaccination for yourself and other household members age 12 and older, if not vaccinated already. The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, but if you or your child has any concerns around getting vaccinated, talk with your child's health care provider. Vaccination is the most important step you can take to protect you and your family from COVID-19. While we encourage everyone age 12 and older to get vaccinated, vaccination is especially important for those with an underlying health condition (such as asthma, obesity or diabetes) that increases the risk of severe COVID-19 illness. The same is true for people who live with someone age 65 or older or with an underlying health condition that increases the risk of severe COVID-19 illness. **Vaccination is free and provided regardless of immigration status.**

In the U.S., the Pfizer vaccine is currently the only vaccine authorized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for children ages 12 to 17. The Pfizer vaccine has been shown to be very safe and effective at protecting people from severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalization and death.

A few things to know about the Pfizer vaccine:

- Type of vaccine: mRNA (see [How the mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines Work](#)).
- Number of shots: Two shots, 21 days apart.
- How it is administered: A shot in the upper arm muscle.
- Ingredients: Does not contain eggs, animal products, preservatives, latex, or the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Side effects: Usually mild to moderate and may include soreness or swelling on the arm where you got the shot, headache, body aches, tiredness and fever. Side effects are more common after the second shot and less common in older adults. Side effects usually last about one to two days after they begin.
- Your child cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

For more information about the Pfizer vaccine, see the [FDA factsheet](#).

Where can my child get vaccinated?

Visit nyc.gov/vaccinefinder to find a site that offers the Pfizer vaccine (you can search by vaccine brand). You can also check with your child's provider to see if they or their affiliated hospital are offering the Pfizer vaccine. Sites that offer the Pfizer vaccine include:

- Some NYC-run vaccination sites (available with and without appointments); see [here](#) for a list of sites
- Hospitals and hospital clinics, including NYC Health + Hospitals acute care hospitals
- Certain Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and community health centers
- Pharmacies, including select CVS and Walgreens/Duane Reade locations
- Some New York State vaccination sites (available by appointment or walk-in services), including Javits Center and Bronx - Bay Eden Senior Center

How should we prepare for an appointment?

- **If your child is nervous about getting vaccinated, here are a few things you can ask them to do for an easier vaccine visit:**
 - Listen to music.
 - Concentrate on something else in the room.
 - Think about something that makes you happy.
 - Take slow and deep breaths.
 - Try to relax the arm as this will make the injection less painful.
- **What to expect at the appointment:**
 - Your child will be checked in.
 - Your child will see the vaccinator and be asked basic health questions.
 - Your child will get vaccinated.
 - Your child will be given a proof of vaccination card (keep this card in a safe place and bring it to the second dose appointment; do not share a picture of the card on social media).
 - Your child will be observed for 15 to 30 minutes to make sure they feel okay after the vaccine.
 - Your child will make a second dose appointment before they leave the site.

Additional considerations:

1. Everyone must complete the [NYS COVID-19 Vaccine Form](#) prior to getting vaccinated. Also, if your child has an appointment, they should bring their appointment confirmation (they can show the email or printout the confirmation).
2. For minors under the age of 18, a parent or legal guardian must consent to vaccination. Consent can be given in person or by phone at the time of the appointment. Some sites will also accept written consent.
3. Children 12 to 15 years of age must be accompanied to the vaccination site by a parent/guardian or an adult caregiver designated by the parent/guardian.
4. Everyone over the age of 2 entering the vaccination site must wear a face covering. You and your child will not be allowed in without one.
5. While you may be asked about health insurance, insurance is **not** required. Your insurer may be billed by the vaccinating provider, but you will not be charged a copay or other fee.
6. You do **not** need to share your immigration status or a Social Security number.
7. Children with disabilities may be eligible for free transportation to and from vaccination sites.
8. Make sure your child gets their second dose by making an appointment 21 days after their first dose (or as soon as possible after that).

If you have any questions about vaccination, we encourage you to speak with your child's primary care provider so you and your child can feel confident about your choice. For answers to frequently asked questions, visit nyc.gov/vaccinefacts. For more information on the COVID-19 vaccines, visit nyc.gov/covidvaccine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel H. Stephens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Daniel H. Stephens, MD
Deputy Commissioner, Division of Family and Child Health
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene