

Vax Chat

Supporting Conversations with Youth about the COVID-19 Vaccine



Just like adults, children and youth have questions about the vaccines and need time to understand and digest the information at hand and help them to make an informed choice.

As adults that intersect with children and youth, you play a key role in getting evidence informed information to youth, which we realize may seem like a daunting task. The resources below are intended to support you and these conversations. Thank you for being a trusted person during such an important time in history.

Before You Start

- [Health Canada](#) approved the Pfizer m-RNA COVID-19 vaccine for children 12–15 years of age on May 5, 2021. It was previously approved for anyone 16+ (or 12-15 for children with complex medical needs).
- The Pfizer vaccine has been found to be safe and effective for this age group. Children will receive two shots at an interval of at least 21 days apart. The exact time between doses for Ontario children has yet to be confirmed.
- Vaccine trials for children as young as 6 months of age and other brands of vaccine are underway.
- Youth involved in child welfare have vulnerabilities that put them at higher risk for contracting and getting sicker from COVID-19 compared to youth not involved in child welfare.
- If your organization has specific guidance around the COVID-19 vaccination for youth in care, know them before you start.



What To Know About Consent

- Under Ontario law, everyone is presumed to have the capacity to make health care decisions for themselves no matter their age.
- This means that young people can make their own choice about whether or not to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, provided they understand the information. This is called *informed consent*.
- Being informed and making a voluntary choice are two of the main principles enshrined in the [Health Care Consent Act](#), the Act that guides health care decision-making in Ontario.
- Unlike some forms, the current [provincial COVID-19 consent form](#) does not ask for an adult to co-sign based on age. This means that youth can sign their own COVID-19 vaccine consent form. NB: It is possible this guidance this change closer to May 31, 2021. If it does, we will issue updated guidance.
- In some cases, especially in the case of older, independent youth, young people may receive the COVID-19 vaccine without checking in with you. Feel free to ask young people if they've been vaccinated but know that this is their personal health information and they do not have to tell you if they don't want to.

- You can read more about youth consent, capacity, and health care decision privacy from the Hospital for Sick Children [here](#).
- If a child or youth is not capable of making their own decision because of a developmental or other special need, depending on your legal authority, you may be able to make the decision for them. It will be important to revisit your agency's policy and coordinate with the young person's care provider to help you work through these unique situations.



How To Get Started

- Set aside dedicated time to speak to young people about the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Know your facts about the vaccine and what the plan is in your local area for accessing an appointment. Be prepared to answer practical questions like: "Who will take me?" and "Where do I go?".
- Be clear at the outset that the decision to get the vaccine is theirs. You are there to have a conversation.
- Ask them to tell you what they already know about COVID-19 and what the vaccine does to assess their level of understanding as you begin your conversation.
- Be sensitive to the fact that some young people may have strong influences that could put pressure on them to make a particular decision.
- Get specific. Use [PrOTCT](#) (developed by the Centre for Effective Practice and Alberta Department of Pediatrics) as a guide when you engage young people:
 - **Pr**: Presume they will get the vaccine
 - **O**: Offer to share your knowledge about the facts and your experience having it.
 - **T**: Tailor the recommendations to any specific health concerns (if they have a medical condition, offer to help them get in touch with their physician).
 - **C**: Address specific concerns but these shouldn't be the bulk of the conversations. Literature around vaccine hesitancy shows that trying to refute myths actually entrenches them.
 - **T**: Talk through a specific plan for where and when to get the vaccine in your local area.

How to End

- Let young people know that you are available to talk again if they want to process the information.
- If they have questions that you don't feel you can answer, help them find someone else that they can speak to. This could be an Elder, a family/community member or a health care provider.
- Encourage young people to do their own research and help them understand how to find reputable information (we have some suggestions [here](#)).
- Remind young people that on the day they will have an opportunity to hear directly from the person giving them the shot and ask them questions.
- Make sure they have their Health Card and/or the ID needed on the day and remind them to bring it with them. If they don't have ID, help them obtain it or write them a letter on agency letter head stating their name, dob and address.
- Be clear on next steps: are they ready to book an appointment? If so, help them make one.
- Do they want you to follow up? Make a plan for when.