



Patron: His Royal Highness, Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah



ACADEMY OF MEDICINE OF MALAYSIA

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PRESS STATEMENT BY COLLEGE OF PAEDIATRICS

COVID-19 Vaccination for Children in Malaysia

The College of Paediatrics, Academy of Medicine of Malaysia, in collaboration with experts from various paediatric sub-specialties and public health, strongly support our government's initiative to roll out the National COVID-19 Immunisation Program for children of ages 5-11 years. The approved Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine schedule consists of two 10µg doses (in contrast to the 30µg dose for ages 12 years and above) to be administered at least 21 days apart.

To date, successful roll-out of mass vaccination programmes for adults and adolescents have demonstrated a significant reduction in the case attack rates, risk of infection and disease burden, allowing safer re-opening of economies, and a notable decrease in the pandemic's crippling impact on healthcare systems. However, to achieve herd immunity and enter the endemic phase, there's a necessity to bridge the gap of vaccination between different populations regardless of their age and socio- economic differences, focusing now on children who are largely unprotected.

The emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant is very concerning. Reports indicate that children infected with the Omicron variants have a 20% higher risk of hospitalisation compared to the Delta variant. In the USA, paediatric COVID-19 admissions rose by 48% during the final week of December 2021, alone. Many of these children were unvaccinated or under-vaccinated. Of importance is the development of the multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) in some who contracted COVID-19. The long-term consequences and profile of MIS-C and long COVID are not fully defined, thus its negative clinical impact may potentially increase in tandem with the rising Omicron infections.

Vaccination Programmes for Children

The College of Paediatrics urges the government to ensure a meticulously executed vaccination programme for children below 12 years old in Malaysia. This is crucial especially when the country is faced with an increased COVID-19-related mortality rate in children. From July to December 2021, 105 deaths were reported among children, 0-17 years old. The disease or the fear of it also results in limited school activities and social interactions that are detrimental to normal childhood development.

Evidence from phase II/III clinical trials and real-world experience have demonstrated that COVID-19 vaccinations are effective and safe for younger children and adolescents. As of November 2021, more than [100 countries](#) have either commenced or are planning to expand COVID-19 vaccinations to children, starting with adolescents (12–17 years old), including Malaysia.

Reports of post-vaccination acute myocarditis/pericarditis among the vaccinated adolescent group have raised some concerns. In view of this, some countries resorted to a single dose vaccine instead of the two-dose schedule for adolescents. However, post-vaccination myocarditis is mild and [conservative management](#) is adequate. Studies are needed to determine if the omission of the second dose results in a significant reduction in post-vaccination myocarditis without compromising the level of protection against COVID-19. We note that in the UK, the single-dose schedule was updated to two doses recently. This was based on increasing evidence demonstrating the substantially lower risk of post-vaccination myocarditis compared to COVID-19-related myocarditis, and the increased dosing efficacy that is required to overcome the Omicron variant.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA) published the safety profile of [8.7 million doses](#) of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine given to children of 5-11 years, reporting predominantly local or systemic reactions and only 11 cases of non-fatal myocarditis. In line with global data and our local vaccine safety study ([SAFECOVAC](#)), the findings to date indicate that post-vaccination myocarditis events are rare, and that most of the cases are mild, self-limiting, and spontaneously resolved.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still evolving with the emergence of new variants. This highlights the urgency in maximizing the protective benefits of vaccination across all age groups, especially children. Based on the published safety profiles and mounting evidence of the benefits from COVID-19 vaccination, the College unequivocally recommends the vaccination of children, especially the school-going age group, of 5 years and above.

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