



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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Date:	30 September 2021		
To:	<b>Honourable Minister Dr Joe Phaahla, Minister of Health</b>	From:	<b>Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on COVID-19 Vaccines</b>

**ADVISORY  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VACCINATING CHILDREN 12-17 YEARS OLD WITH COVID-19 VACCINES**

**Problem Statement**

**Background**

- The current roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines in South Africa targets everyone 18 years and over.
- Consideration has become necessary as to whether children between the ages of 12 and 17 years should be given COVID-19 vaccines.

**Supporting Document**

- This Advisory is supported by the background document (attached) outlining the motivation to vaccinate children.

**Points considered**

- As the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded, evidence of children being infected by SARS-CoV-2 has emerged. Furthermore, information exists on the impact of the pandemic on children's education, mental health, and general well-being. Since the onset of the third wave to the peak, the fraction of all COVID-19 cases aged 19 years or younger has been higher than in the first and second waves.
- In children with significant co-morbidities the benefits of vaccination greatly outweigh the risk of severe COVID-19 if not vaccinated.
- Protection of the older learner cohort of children in the secondary education sector and particularly the 16 to 17 years old group who should be writing their matric examinations at the end of this year is a priority to allow them to get a tertiary education and thus protect the future generation of economically active persons.
- Clinical trials of mRNA vaccines in children 12 to 15 years old recipients have demonstrated a favourable safety profile, produced a greater immune response than in young adults, and was highly effective against COVID-19.

- Very rarely, cases of myocarditis have occurred after the second vaccine dose, particularly in younger persons. This risk following vaccination needs to be balanced against the risk of severe COVID-19 disease, which includes a significant risk of myocarditis if not vaccinated.
- Several countries have issued directives for vaccination of 12 to 17 years old children. The South African Paediatric Association strongly recommends that children at risk in the age range 12 to 17 years old be vaccinated.
- Both the Constitution and the Children’s Act places an obligation on the State to protect children and, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, the State must provide evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs to fulfil children’s rights to protection against severe illness from the virus, and their rights to basic education.

**Recommendations**

- While the priority at this time must continue to be on high risk adults, the vaccination program should be extended to include all children 12 to 17 years old.
- Despite rare cases of self-limited myocarditis, the benefit-risk assessment for COVID-19 vaccination shows a favourable balance and therefore COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for children 12 to 17 years old.
- Children must receive a single dose of Pfizer vaccine as the risk of myocarditis occurs mainly after the second dose. The decision to give a second dose can be made at a later stage once more evidence of benefit and harm become available
- Since a number of those who are 16 to 17 years of age will be writing their matric examinations at the end of this year, they should be prioritised for vaccination.
- In addition, children 12 to 15 years of age who are at high risk for severe COVID-19 (see *table below*), should also be vaccinated.
- Pregnant girls (between 12 to 17 years old) are advised to be vaccinated as benefits outweigh risks.

**Table: Risk groups for vaccination of children 12-17 years of age** (modified from current UK Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommendations)

<b>Disease</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Chronic respiratory disease</b>	Individuals with a severe lung condition, including those with asthma that requires continuous or repeated use of systemic steroids or with previous exacerbations requiring hospital admission, bronchiectasis, cystic fibrosis, interstitial lung disease, and bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD).
<b>Chronic heart disease and vascular disease</b>	Congenital heart disease acquired heart disease (such as cardiomyopathy), or chronic heart failure in individuals requiring regular medication and/or follow-up for heart disease.
<b>Chronic kidney disease</b>	Chronic kidney disease at, chronic kidney failure, nephrotic syndrome, kidney transplantation.
<b>Chronic liver disease</b>	Cirrhosis, biliary atresia, chronic hepatitis.
<b>Chronic neurological disease</b>	Conditions in which respiratory function may be compromised due to neurological or neuromuscular disease. including individuals with cerebral palsy, severe or profound and multiple learning disabilities , Trisomy 21 , epilepsy, motor neurone disease and related or similar conditions; hereditary

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	and degenerative disease of the nervous system or muscles; or other severe neurological disability.
<b>Diabetes mellitus and other endocrine disorders</b>	Diabetes and Addison's disease.
<b>Immunosuppression</b>	Immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, including patients undergoing chemotherapy leading to immunosuppression, patients undergoing radical radiotherapy, solid organ transplant recipients, bone marrow or stem cell transplant recipients, HIV infection at all stages, genetic disorders affecting the immune system. Individuals who are receiving immunosuppressive or immunomodulating biological therapy. Individuals treated with or likely to be treated with systemic steroids for more than a month. Anyone with a history of haematological malignancy, including leukaemia, lymphoma, and myeloma and those with autoimmune diseases such as systemic lupus erythematosus or juvenile idiopathic arthritis who may require long term immunosuppressive treatments.
<b>Asplenia or dysfunction of the spleen</b>	This includes conditions that may lead to splenic dysfunction, such as homozygous sickle cell disease.
<b>Morbid obesity</b>	Body Mass Index (BMI) $\geq 40$ kg/m <sup>2</sup> .
<b>Severe mental illness</b>	Individuals with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, or any mental illness that causes severe functional impairment.
<b>Adolescents in long-stay nursing and residential care settings</b>	Adolescents in advanced care settings would be eligible for vaccination because they fall into one of the clinical risk groups above (for example learning disabilities). Given the likely high risk of exposure in these settings, where a high proportion of the population would be considered eligible, vaccination of the whole resident population is recommended.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Kind regards,



**PROFESSOR BARRY SCHOUB**  
**CHAIRPERSON: MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 VACCINES**  
**DATE: 30-09-2021**

**CC:**

- » **Dr N Crisp (Acting Director-General: Health)**
- » **Incident Management Team**