



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health and Social Services

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

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May 10, 2020

Dear Alaska parents and students,

Thank you for all you have done this year. I have been so inspired by the way Alaska's students, parents, guardians, and educators have risen to the challenges of the past year. This year has not been easy, but you have found ways to keep our youth engaged, active, loved and supported through these trying times. We have much brighter days ahead and much to learn from each other as we work toward continued resiliency and recovery.

As we look forward to summer and a return to an in-person, healthy school year next year, I would like to bring to your attention that on Monday, May 10, 2021, the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\) authorized the Pfizer vaccine for ages 12+](#). I encourage you to discuss this with your pediatrician or family doctor, and to consider getting youth 12 years and older vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible.

Vaccination provides the opportunity to protect children from COVID-19 and protects others in your community who cannot be vaccinated. Fully vaccinated students do not need to quarantine even if they have been in close contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19. While most children who test positive for COVID-19 usually experience minimal symptoms, some can develop severe illness or long-lasting symptoms called "long COVID." Preventing possible complications from COVID is another important reason to vaccinate.

The next step for the vaccine is the anticipated approval by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) on Wednesday, May 12. Appointments will be available to schedule starting Wednesday afternoon. As you make vaccine appointments for youth age 12-17, we suggest you check with your provider or clinic to make sure the Pfizer vaccine is the one being offered.

Both the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are currently authorized for ages 18+. We think it's likely that later this fall further authorizations will provide the opportunity for children ages 2 and older to also be vaccinated against COVID-19.

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FDA emergency use authorization means the vaccines have gone through all the needed clinical trials in children and have undergone careful scientific review prior to authorization. The vaccines were authorized quickly because bureaucracy was minimized to help put this pandemic behind us. No standards of quality or safety were sacrificed.

Short-term side effects of the vaccines are usually mild and can go away within 1-2 days. These include fatigue, headache and muscle aches. For more information about the Pfizer vaccine, please refer to the [FDA fact sheet](#).

We know some people have questions about the long-term effects of vaccines. The vaccines disintegrate in your body within hours to days and do not linger in your body. Adverse reactions are seen within minutes to weeks, not years, and these vaccines also do not change your DNA. This is the reason that there is not a concern for other long term side effects including infertility. Hundreds of millions of doses have now been safely given around the world.

As a parent or guardian, it's understandable to have questions about whether vaccination is the right choice for your child. It is important to learn about COVID vaccines to make an informed decision. If you have questions, I encourage you to talk to your child's pediatrician, come to any of our public science meetings every Wednesday from 12-1 pm, read more at our website, <http://covidvax.alaska.gov>, request our physician panel to come speak to a group of people or talk to your school nurse. A special Zoom meeting, "COVID-19 Vaccine for Youth by Youth" is also planned for Thursday at 6:30 pm. Tune in at this [link](#).

Your pediatrician or primary health care provider may offer vaccine as well as most pharmacies. Many locations offer walk-ins and do not need appointments. Visit <http://covidvax.alaska.gov> or call the State Vaccine Helpline at 907-646-3322 for appointments of support in scheduling.

I personally am relieved to have my older child fully vaccinated and my younger child scheduled to be vaccinated now that they are eligible. Whatever your decision, please know that we here at the Department of Health and Social Services are here to support you and your children and to do whatever we can to promote the health and wellbeing of Alaskans.

Thank you for all that you do.



Anne Zink, MD, FACEP

Chief Medical Officer, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services