

Town hall takeaways: Experts give answers on COVID-19 vaccine for 12+, dispel myths

May 17, 2021

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Article type: [News](#)

Topics: [Adolescent Health/Medicine](#), [COVID-19](#), [Infectious Diseases](#), [Public Health](#), [Vaccine/Immunization](#)



Editor's note: For the latest news on COVID-19, visit <http://bit.ly/AAPNewsCOVID19>.

After working to carry forward COVID-19 vaccine recommendations for adolescents 12 years and older, Amanda Cohn, M.D., FAAP, expressed relief at being able to take her daughter to receive her first dose.

Dr. Cohn, executive secretary of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), joined an AAP town hall that provided updates on COVID-19 vaccine for adolescents and discussed myths circulating online. Also participating in the virtual meeting were Yvonne “Bonnie” Maldonado, M.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Committee on Infectious Diseases (COID), and Anne R. Edwards, M.D., FAAP, AAP chief population health officer.

The [AAP](#) and [CDC](#) recently released recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in children and adolescents. Both organizations support coadministration of COVID-19 vaccine with other routine child and adolescent vaccines. The guidance comes at a crucial time, as pediatricians work to boost childhood immunization rates that have slipped during the pandemic.

“We’re still between 10% and 25% behind on vaccinations for routine vaccines for children of all ages ... adolescents traditionally are not as up to date on their vaccines as younger children are,” Dr. Maldonado said.

Dr. Maldonado stressed that pediatricians should listen to families and avoid discounting their concerns. “You are really an important fount of information for them,” she said.

Managing misinformation

Many myths are circulating online about COVID-19 vaccines, and pediatricians should be ready to talk with families about them, the panelists said.

Pediatricians can stay on top of the latest misinformation and use fact checking websites from groups such as the [Virality Project](#) at Stanford University, Dr. Maldonado said. The CDC also has [information on myths](#).

A recent example is the COVID-19 vaccine magnet challenge circulating on the social media platform TikTok. Participants post videos showing magnets sticking to their arm and claim a microchip inserted in their arm when they received the vaccine is attracting the magnets.

“It’s not true, but these are the kinds of things that you know as pediatricians ... you’re going to have a lot of your families come and talk to you about,” Dr. Maldonado said. “Make sure that they understand that these are things that happen all the time, that there’s a lot of misinformation — not just about vaccines but about other issues.”

Another rumor circulating online is that the COVID-19 vaccine causes infertility.

“There’s no biological plausibility in COVID-19 causing infertility,” said Dr. Cohn, the CDC’s liaison to COVID and chief medical officer of the CDC National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

Thousands of women have participated in the clinical trials since last July, and there have been no reports of infertility or safety signals related to the vaccine, she said.

Many groups behind COVID-19 myths have spread misinformation about other health issues. “... these groups label themselves to sound like legitimate organizations, and in some cases, they’ll actually have the name ‘physician’ or ... ‘medical’ in their title so that they sound official,” Dr. Maldonado said.

Parents can be encouraged to ask their adolescents what they think about being vaccinated against COVID-19. “They are so excited about the idea of things getting back to normal and them being confident and feeling protected and not being scared anymore,” Dr. Cohn said.

Other topics addressed during the town hall included:

- The need for unvaccinated children to continue wearing masks in schools and other places where the virus may spread in their community. “Children unfortunately who haven’t been vaccinated ... are still at risk of being exposed to COVID in public settings” said Dr. Cohn. The CDC also recommends continued mask-wearing by people with immunocompromising conditions.
- The possibility that Moderna vaccine will be available for patients 12 years and older before school begins.
- Childhood death from COVID-19. Though lower than for adults, the death rate is “not an insignificant problem,” Dr. Maldonado said. “... children aren’t supposed to die at the same rate as adults, and if you look at the number of deaths that have been seen in children under 18, they rank up there in the top 10 causes.”

Resources

- The next webinar, Becoming a COVID-19 Vaccinator, will be held at 7 p.m. CDT May 20. Register at https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_8kYhuqX5Q8mZ5sbuzIR-5w.
- Connecting with the Experts: A COVID-19 Townhall Series, <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/connecting-with-the-experts/>
- CDC Pediatric Health Care Professionals Vaccination Toolkit, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/toolkits/pediatrician.html>

