

Transcript Details

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What to Know About the Delta Variant: A Pediatrician's Perspective

Dr. Shu:

Coming to you from the ReachMD studios, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines*. I'm Dr. Jennifer Shu, and on this program, I'm going to be talking about what we currently know about the risks and impacts of the Delta variant on our youngest patients.

So what we know now about our pediatric patients is that children make up about 22 percent of the U.S. population, and that translates to 72.8 million children under the age of 18. In total, since the pandemic started, pediatric cases have made up about 14.5 percent of infections, but we see that it is increasing rapidly. Fortunately, serious illness in children is pretty uncommon, and very few children have died. The risk, however, is not zero, and we know that over 300 children died of COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic, and that number is still rising.

Vaccinating as many people as possible is really important to help stem the tide of the rise in cases due to the Delta variant of COVID-19. Children under 12 currently are not eligible for vaccination, so it's really important for anyone else who's eligible to get the vaccine. What we do know is that millions of children under the age of 18 have received at least one dose of vaccine safely. As of August 25, 2021, 11.7 million children have gotten at least one dose of vaccine, and 8.8 million of kids under 18 are fully vaccinated.

For parents who have questions or might be hesitant to vaccinate their kids, it's really important to ask what specific questions and concerns they might have about giving the COVID-19 vaccine to their children and then address those questions directly. For example, I asked one teenager what concerns she had, and her concern was that she had heard that the mRNA vaccine might affect fertility. So I explained how the mRNA vaccine works and how it is just a recipe for your body to make immunity against COVID-19, and she felt more comfortable about that. I think if we really address the concerns that the patients have specifically, that can help them with their hesitation and possible anxiety about getting the vaccine.

For children who aren't yet eligible to receive the vaccine, it's really important for all the people around them to get vaccinated, if eligible, and this includes older siblings or other students in the school, parents, grandparents, teachers, and childcare providers. Unvaccinated children in particular should continue to follow precautions, such as wearing masks indoors and staying distanced from others whenever possible. And then, we always encourage good hand hygiene and disinfecting surfaces, as well as seeking areas that are better ventilated.

The recent increases in cases due to the Delta variant is a big reminder to all of us that we need to stay flexible and to adjust our habits as we learn more about the virus in order to help keep our kids safe and healthy.

For ReachMD, I'm Dr. Jennifer Shu. To access this and other episodes in our series, visit ReachMD.com/COVID19, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening.