November 23, 2021

A Message from Pediatric Department Chairs

The mission of the Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs, which includes leaders of departments of pediatrics at academic medical centers throughout North America is to advance and protect child health. We thus applaud the FDA decision on October 29, 2021, to issue an Emergency Use Authorization for a new formulation of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for use in children aged 5–11 years, administered as 2 doses (10 μg, 0.2 mL each), 3 weeks apart. This decision was followed on November 2, 2021 by a recommendation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in children aged 5–11 years for the prevention of COVID-19. The decision for approval was based on a review of data from a clinical trial that initially enrolled >2,200 participants in the 5-11 year age group, randomized to receive either vaccine or placebo. This vaccine was shown to have an efficacy of >90% in preventing symptomatic, laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in children aged 5–11 years with or without evidence of previous SARS-CoV-2 infection. The antibody response to 2 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine without evidence of previous SARS-CoV-2 infection was at least as high as the response observed in 16–25 year old subjects. Serious adverse events were uncommon and occurred with similar frequency among vaccine recipients and those given placebo.

The recent surge of COVID-19 cases across the country caused by the delta variant has shown that this pandemic is far from over and that children need to be protected from short- and long-term consequences of the disease. The lack of vaccine availability, particularly for children below 12 years of age, has had an undeniable impact on the disproportionately large number of infected children in the recent wave. Lack of vaccination has also impacted in-person school attendance, with mental and behavioral health problems superimposed on learning concerns.

While the emergency use approval of the vaccine for children aged 5-11 years is a great step forward, vaccine related misinformation is rampant and needs to be actively addressed with factual information so the maximum number of children can be protected. We urge pediatricians and healthcare workers dealing with children to take the lead in promoting vaccination of eligible children. It is only through a concerted effort by all that we will achieve the goal of vaccinating every child in the U.S. and beyond. We encourage that strategies be developed to facilitate vaccine delivery to demographic groups that have experienced disproportionate COVID-19 morbidity and mortality and to prevent secondary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as reduced in-person learning.

Together, we can put an end to the worst pandemic of our generation.

On behalf of The Pediatric Department Chairs of North America,

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