



Memorandum

To: Child Welfare Services Team and Placement Providers
From: Dawn Barton, Permanency Management Director
Date: January 18, 2022
Subject: COVID-19 Vaccine and Face Mask Guidance

This week, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) issued updated recommendations related to COVID-19 vaccines for children, ages 12-17. Please review the below guidance and position as it relates to children and youth in foster care. The CDC and DHEC recommendations change frequently and DSS will update our guidance as new recommendations are released. We appreciate your patience and flexibility as we continue to monitor and navigate COVID-19. Thank you for all you do each day!

Updated mRNA COVID-19 Booster Recommendations

On January 5, 2022, for the prevention of severe illness and death from COVID-19, the CDC recommended the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster for children 12-17 years old at least five (5) months after children finish the first vaccination series. DHEC supports this recommendation and is now making the Pfizer COVID-9 vaccine booster available to children ages 12-17 years.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Youth age 5 and older

On November 2, 2021, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the CDC recommended the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech Pediatric COVID-19 vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19 and the prevention of severe illness and death from COVID-19 in children age 5 to 11. DHEC supports the decision of the CDC and is now making this vaccine available to children age 5-11 (consent form at <https://scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/Pfizer-Fact-Sheet-Administration-Form-D-4260-for-DHEC-clinics-only.pdf>).

DSS is not providing an update to its guidance on the wearing of face masks. The guidance issued May 2021, as re-stated in this memorandum, remains in effect.

Policy

Agency policy makes immunizations “routine (ordinary) medical care”, and when a child is in the legal custody of DSS, the agency has the authority to make decisions regarding routine (ordinary) medical care. However, parental engagement in all health care decisions is best practice and is encouraged as well as listening to the child’s voice in the matter.

Guidelines

COVID-19 Vaccination

DSS staff and caregiving providers should consult (1) the parents and (2) the child or youth, if age and developmentally appropriate, regarding COVID-19 vaccination for those 5 years and older, as well as (3) the healthcare provider for the child or youth, if possible, for that provider’s general recommendations regarding the COVID-19 vaccine for children and youth age 5 and older.

The decision of the parent and the child or youth should be memorialized in writing and signed by parent. For those children or youth whose parents have had parental rights terminated, the decision rests with DSS, but again the child or youth’s perspective/opinion should be sought, and documented, and the preference is to obtain medical advice or guidance on each child from the healthcare provider, and document that opinion, as well. If parental rights have been terminated and the youth is in an adoptive placement, DSS should consult with the prospective adoptive parents and the child or youth. The decision of the prospective adoptive parent and child or youth should be memorialized in writing.

Foster Care Children Wearing Masks in Schools

As the legal custodian of children in foster care, and based upon the latest CDC guidance May 12, 2021, DSS does not authorize caregivers (foster parents or group home staff member) to sign the school opt-out form at this time for children who have not been vaccinated.

Children in the legal custody of DSS who have not been vaccinated should continue to wear masks in accordance with CDC and DHEC recommendations for school and public settings, and as required by school rules. However, caregivers are authorized to sign the school opt-out form for children who have been fully vaccinated.

Fully vaccinated means a period of 2 weeks has passed after the second dose in a 2- dose vaccine, or 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine (*only the 2-dose Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been approved for use in children at this time). The relevant risks and guidance will be re-assessed based upon the facts and circumstances during the transition to the new school year.

If you require further clarification, please email FPhelp@dss.sc.gov.