The Heart Health - COVID-19 Connection

Suppose you're a parent of a child who is eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. You heard reports of the risks of the vaccine in children related to heart conditions, known as myocarditis and pericarditis. Here's the bottom line: These risks are incredibly small and the conditions are treatable. In fact, the most recent research shows that the chances of developing myocarditis are far greater in those who develop COVID-19 than in those who get vaccinated.

The most recent information on this topic comes from the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. The study examined all people who were hospitalized in the U.S. between March 2020 and January 2021, which totaled more than 36 million people. They found that myocarditis was almost 16 times more likely to occur in people with COVID-19 than those who didn't have it. The researchers noted that this study further reinforced the importance of vaccinations and other methods for stopping the spread of COVID-19.

Myocarditis can occur with COVID-19 due to a complication known as multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C), according to Juanita Hunter, M.D., a pediatric cardiologist with the University of Miami Health System. MIS-C causes complications that affect the brain, eyes, lungs, liver, heart, and other organs. Severe cases are extremely rare: two percent of people impacted by MIS-C die from the condition.

"Though relatively uncommon, these complications associated with COVID-19 illness occur with greater frequency and are far more severe in manifestation than vaccine-related myocarditis," says Dr. Hunter.
"It is thus safer for the individual, family and for the general population to receive the COVID-19 vaccine compared with the potential risks of SARS-CoV2 infection." - Dr. Hunter

Some parents are concerned about the risks of myocarditis and pericarditis, which cause heart inflammation, related to the COVID-19 vaccination in children. According to recent data from the CDC, 1,000 cases of these conditions have occurred after COVID vaccination in the United States. The risk appear to be higher in male adolescents and young adults age 16 and over.

However, when you consider the full scope of the COVID-19 vaccination effort, the overall risk is quite rare.

"These cases have occurred on the background of approximately 52 million vaccine doses (22 million second doses) in the 12 to 29 age group," says Dr. Hunter. "Most patients diagnosed with myocarditis have been hospitalized with a mild course and a short hospital stay. Patients have responded well to conventional anti-inflammatory therapy with full recovery, and no deaths have been reported."

**Why vaccination is still the answer**

The bottom line is that despite the risks, the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and other major health organizations still recommend vaccination for everyone age 12 and older.

Dr. Hunter suggests that parents should be vigilant and look out for symptoms in the days after your child gets vaccinated.
"If your child has chest pain, palpitations, shortness of breath, fatigue, or any symptoms suggestive of a heart problem after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, you should seek medical attention," she says. "Ongoing follow-up for anyone diagnosed with myocarditis is also important."

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Prevent a second heart attack

A subsequent heart attack is not always bigger or worse than the first one. But, it increases the risk for heart disease and complications, which can lead to more damage to the heart muscle. After surviving a heart attack, you can make life-saving changes to improve your heart health and significantly reduce your risk of a second myocardial infarction. Read more.